Chapter Five

Representation and Tripartition: the Ontology
A Study of Foucault's Order of Things
I. Introduction: The Order of Words, Things and Life

a. The making of a magnum opus

At the end of the last chapter, I had shown how the first three works of Foucault point towards a trichotomization in terms of the three domains of mentality, materiality and physicality. Foucault picks up next these three categories, in the form of language, things and life, respectively, and studies the order presented in them down the history of post-Renaissance Western thought, to carve out from silence, absence and death his magnum opus, his fourth book-length work, *The Order of Things*. Originally titled in French as what would read in English ‘Words and Things’, *Les mots et les choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines* was first published in 1966, four years after *Naissance de la clinique*. In the intervening years, Foucault published a short eponymous book *Raymond Roussel* (1963) and a number of articles and reviews. Notable among these articles are four long pieces on writers: ‘Le non du père’ (1962) on Hölderlin, ‘Une Préface à la transgression’ (1963) on Georges Bataille, ‘Le langage à l’infini’ (1963) on Maurice Blanchot, and ‘La prose d’Acteon’ (1964) on Pierre Klossowski. The first three of these four articles are included in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (1977), and I discuss them in subsequent chapters.

Publication facts of this fourth lengthy book by Foucault read like tracts of magic, and shed sufficient light on his increasing importance as a thinker. After the almost total commercial failure of *Histoire de la folie* and *Naissance de la clinique*, the publisher, Gallimard brought out only 3000 copies of *Les mots et les choses*, which were all sold out within the first week. A second edition of 5000 copies was also exhausted within six more weeks, and finally the book sold 50000 copies within the first year itself. The English translation appeared in 1970, under the title *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, since there were already at least two books with the title ‘Words and Things’. The publisher of the English edition explains this in a note appended at the beginning of the book and also claims that Foucault preferred the revised title to the original one:

A literal translation of the French title of this work (*Les Mots et les choses*) would have given rise to confusion with two other books that have already appeared under the title *Words and things*. The publisher therefore agreed with the author on the alternate title *The order of things*, which was, in fact, M. Foucault’s original preference.1

This book has, thus, all the marks that can make it a legend in publication history and a storehouse of tales: a four-year gestation period for one of the greatest minds of our times, a phenomenal sales record and a bizarre and accidental imperative for a change in title. The current chapter proposes to study this ‘legendary’ magnum opus of Foucault, and connect its contents to the basic thesis of this dissertation.

b. A cautious 'Foreword': Objectives and Challenges

This being one of the first works by Foucault to be translated into English (most of his earlier works were translated later), he adds extremely cautiously a 'Foreword to the English edition', in which he gives guidelines to the alien reader about the objectives of the book and the problems and challenges it entails. Conscious of the manualistic intent of the foreword, Foucault says, 'This foreword should perhaps be headed 'Directions for Use'.' and accordingly outlines three major objectives of the book. The first objective, as Foucault notes, is to test, as opposed to the premium placed on the exact sciences on the ground that the other disciplines based on life, words, and things lack in regularity, if 'non-formal knowledge' also had a system. For Foucault,

In France at least, the history of science and thought gives pride of place to mathematics, cosmology, and physics... The other disciplines, however—those, for example, that concern living beings, languages, or economic facts—are considered too tinged with empirical thought, too exposed to the vagaries of chance or imagery, to age-old traditions and external events, for it to be supposed that their history could be anything but irregular... But what if empirical knowledge, at a given time and in a given culture, did possess a well-defined regularity?... If, in short, the history of non-formal knowledge had itself a system? That was my initial hypothesis—the first risk I took.3

This first objective points at two important features of the book. First, it claims to deal with three, and only three, 'non-formal' sciences, those concerning living beings, languages, and economic facts, corresponding to the very three categories of physicality, mentality and materiality, respectively, and thus one can expect in it a more cohesive thesis in favour of the Foucauldian tripartition. Secondly, the proposed attempt to see if these disciplines have a regularity, promises a possible exposition on the concept of episteme, already hinted at in his earlier works. Since these notions of regularity and the episteme might be misconstrued as a thesis in global uniformity at a certain period and the search for roots, Foucault points at the second objective of his book:

This book must be read as a comparative, and not a symptomatological, study. It was not my intention, on the basis of a particular type of knowledge or body of ideas, to draw up a picture of a period, or to reconstitute the spirit of a century... It was not to be an analysis of Classicism in general, nor a search for a Weltanschauung, but a strictly 'regional' study... The second risk I took was in having wished to describe not so much the genesis of our sciences as an epistemological space specific to a particular period.4

The notion of 'epistemological space' points towards a certain uniformity in the rules of discursive formation in a period, which the initiators of discourse may not themselves be conscious of. In short, factors of the episteme are not conscious and manifest; they lie at the

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3 Ibid., ix-x.
4 Ibid., x-xi.
level of the unconscious, at a level deeper than the surface. Unearthing them thus requires, and this is Foucault’s third objective, an employment of the ‘archaeological’ method:

What was common to the natural history, the economics, and the grammar of the Classical period was certainly not present to the consciousness of the scientist... but, unknown to themselves, the naturalists, economists, and grammarians employed the same rules to define the objects proper to their own study, to form their concepts, to build their theories. It is these rules of formation, which were never formulated in their own right, but are only to be found in widely differing theories, concepts and objects of study, that I have tried to reveal, by isolating, as their specific locus, a level that I have called, somewhat arbitrarily perhaps, archaeological.

Having talked about the different objectives of the book, Foucault proceeds next to warn the English reader about the different problems that his approach entails and what the he or she should be especially cautious about.

First of all, Foucault lists the different problems that critics have found with his method. For him, this book has raised in its reception three problems The first is what Foucault calls ‘The problem of change’, or that his notion of the episteme has been taken by some critics as being against the notion of change. He refutes the charge strongly and shows how his book deals with nothing but change in the Western order of knowledge; a change which, however, has two corollaries: first, that within an identifiable episteme, all apparent changes and disparities can be dissolved in the manifestation of different facets of the same order, and secondly, that any subsequent change is not of the historically deterministic kind, but one entailing discontinuities. The second problem Foucault mentions is ‘The problem of causality’, or that according to some critics he does not intend to attribute causality to the episteme and only reviews the transformations. While denying the mere ‘review’ status that critics accord his work on the defense that it is an involved exposition stemming from the same episteme that it describes, Foucault points out how his work does refuse causality any primacy, because his history is one that fights shy of teleologies. The third problem that Foucault lists is the ‘The problem of the subject’, or that while, for critics, his distinction between the epistemological level of knowledge (scientific consciousness) and the archaeological level of knowledge points towards the subject, Foucault’s thesis in the book is that the subject is subsidiary to the conditions of discursive formation. Indicating that an analysis of his exposition as one foreboding the birth of the subject is nothing but a misinterpretation of his work, Foucault shows how the appearance of ‘man’ as a discursive entity in the nineteenth century, is one that is subservient to the order of tripartite discursive reality. ‘Man’ is thus merely implicated as an object in the order of things, and he, on his appearance, does not get the status of supreme subjectivity conferred on him.

5Ibid., xi.
Having cautioned the reader of the different charges against his work, and having strongly defended his enterprise in their light, Foucault turns next to a label that was used to describe his work by admirers and critics alike. The label is that of 'Structuralism', and while it has already been shown in the last chapter how Foucault was extremely wary of being called a structuralist, here in introducing his work to an uninitiated readership, he leaves no stone unturned to deny the epithet. He says,

The last point is a request to the English-speaking reader. In France, certain half-witted 'commentators' persist in labelling me a 'structuralist'. I have been unable to get it into their tiny minds that I have used none of the methods, concepts, or key terms that characterize structural analysis.

I should be grateful if a more serious public would free me from a connection that certainly does me honour, but that I have not deserved. There may well be certain similarities between the works of the structuralists and my own work. It would hardly behove me, of all people, to claim that my discourse is independent of conditions and rules of which I am very largely unaware, and which determine other work that is being done today. But it is only too easy to avoid the trouble of analysing such work by giving it an admittedly impressive-sounding, but inaccurate, label.6

Thus, after laying down the objectives of his book, Foucault guides the reader's attention to the most common misinterpretations that his work might give rise to, and he suggests that a proper reception of this work lies in avoiding these pitfalls.

Right at the beginning of the book, thus, Foucault leaves, for a readership unaccustomed to his thought, a beginner's guide to the whole of it—its ontology, epistemology, and ethics too. In the first objective that he mentions, Foucault exposes his ontology, where there is a tripartition of domains of discourse formation. He shows, in unambiguous terms, how there are three domains of human acculturation, those of mentality, corresponding to the linguistic communication of ideas; materiality, corresponding to the material production, possession, exchange and consumption of wealth; and physicality, corresponding to the laws by which bodies live. At the epistemological level, he lays bare both his vocabulary and method in the remaining two objectives. The second objective of the book points towards his vocabulary of the *episteme*, while the third mentions his archaeological method. Having discussed his ontology and epistemology at the level of objectives, Foucault mentions the ethical part of his thought while refuting the criticisms. It should be remembered that the last chapter located the Foucauldian ethics in unmasking normative hierarchies in discursive formations. Here, however, though there is a definite dehierarchist undertone in Foucault's acknowledged attempt at unearthing, from beneath the façade of order, the 'truth' about positivities, the ethical concern lies more in defending one's enterprise from onslaughts stemming from a rationalist or positivist approach to history. This book is, thus, more than a thesis in praxis, a defense of one's underlying politics.

6Ibid., xiv.
c. Of Order and Disorder: the Prefatory Note

While initial sections of the book give a preview into its contents, in terms of its avowed attempt to trace the 'order' in a 'period' in the domains of 'words', 'things' and 'life', one has to wait till the 'Preface' to know what this order really is. And then one sees, through the eyes of the ever-subversive Foucault, not an attempt to uphold this category at all, but one to unearth, through a tracking down of order, its obverse; an attempt to locate at its margins the ever-present disorder. Foucault begins the 'Preface' with an interesting passage from Borges, where the categorization of a simple linguistic element, 'animal', in a different culture, questions, in its apparent disorder, the very stability of Western classification. Quite legitimately, Foucault credits the whole of his current book to this passage:

This book first arose out of a passage in Borges... This passage quotes a 'certain Chinese encyclopaedia' in which it is written that 'animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies'. In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking that.

This 'strange' classification cannot be called chaotic as, to another culture—the Chinese, it is probably as ordered as it can be. So, what is amiss here is only a specific type of order, a specific 'table' of classifications that a culture internalizes as the only possible truth. Foucault calls this relatively ordered space of classification a 'tabula', upon whose apparently smooth surface a language carves out, in it its peculiar classificatory order, the 'reality' for a culture:

The monstrous quality that runs through Borges's enumeration consists...in the facts that the common ground on which such meetings are possible has itself been destroyed. What is impossible is not the propinquity of the things listed, but the very site on which their propinquity would be possible... What has been removed, in short, is the famous 'operating table'...a tabula, that enables thought to operate upon the entities of our world, to put them in order, to divide them into classes, to group them according to names that designate their similarities and their differences—the table upon which, since the beginning of time, language has intersected space.

Order is thus not an a priori, but one created within the otherwise blank spaces of a mode of thought, which however, once brought into being through knowledge, permeates and animates all things and becomes their inner, and as if unalienable, law. Foucault says,

Order is, at one and the same time, that which is given in things as their inner law, the hidden network that determines the way they confront one another, and also that which has no existence except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language, and it is only in the blank spaces of this grid that order manifests itself in depth as though already there, waiting in silence for the moment of its expression.

8 Ibid., xvi-xvii.
9 Ibid., xx.
The codes of a culture, thus, establish, on the one hand, empirical orders, which all individuals have to deal with. At the other extremity of thought, scientific theories or philosophical interpretations attempt to legitimize this order by explaining why order exists in general, and why this particular order has been established instead of some other. But between these two regions, there can be a domain where a culture, might free itself sufficiently to discover that these orders are perhaps not the only possible ones or the best ones. This is the domain that Foucault chooses to explore in his current examination and see how in Western society, order has worked itself out in the three domains of words, life and material objects, to provide it with a system of thought. Foucault says,

Thus, between the already 'encoded' eye and reflexive knowledge there is a middle region which liberates order itself... The present study is an attempt to analyse that experience. I am concerned to show its developments, since the sixteenth century, in the mainstream of a culture such as ours: in what way, as one traces—against the current, as it were—language as it has been spoken, natural creatures as they have been perceived and grouped together, and exchanges as they have been practised; in what way, then, our culture has made manifest the existence of order, and how, to the modalities of that order, the exchanges owed their laws, the living beings their constants, the words their sequence and their representative value; what modalities of order have been recognized, posited, linked with space and time, in order to create the positive basis of knowledge as we find it employed in grammar and philology, in natural history and biology, in the study of wealth and political economy.10

However, it should be noted that Foucault uses here two sets of terms to describe positivities belonging to the same domain in the mentality-materiality-physicality triad. What this indicates is the sure fact that the Western episteme must have undergone a fundamental change at some point of time, by virtue of which, the disciplines underwent a corresponding change. Foucault shows next, how the insistence on representation as the founding principle of order in the Classical age vanishes in the nineteenth century, in the light of a stress on historicity, and this epistemological shift heralds biology, political economy, and philology in the places of exchange of wealth, natural history, and general grammar. Qualifying this next major epistemological shift in Western thought, he says,

In this way, analysis has been able to show the coherence that existed, throughout the Classical age, between the theories of representation and the theories of language, of the natural orders, and of wealth and value. It is this configuration that, from the nineteenth century onward, changes entirely; the theory of representation disappears as the universal foundation of all possible orders; language as the spontaneous tabula, the primary grid of things, as an indispensable link between representation and things, is eclipsed in its turn; a profound historicity penetrates into the heart of things, isolates and defines them in their own coherence, imposes upon them the forms of order implied by the continuity of time; the analysis of exchange and money gives way to the study of production, that of the organism takes precedence over the search for taxonomic characteristics, and, above all, language loses its privileged position and becomes, in its turn, a historical form coherent with the density of its own past.11

10 Ibid., xxii.
11 Ibid., xxiii.
Foucault does not stop with the nineteenth century, but goes a step further to show how this historical premium puts man in the centre of the discursive universe for the first time in Western intellectual history, thereby giving rise to, in the twentieth century, a body of ‘human sciences’. Psychology, sociology, and literary and myth studies replace the erstwhile quest for life, things, and words, respectively, in an ‘anthropologization’ of the threefold episteme.

But as things became increasingly reflexive, seeking the principle of their intelligibility only in their own development, and abandoning the space of representation, man enters in his turn, and for the first time, the field of Western knowledge... Whence all the chimeras of the new humanisms, all the facile solutions of an ‘anthropology’ understood as a universal reflection on man, half-empirical, half-philosophical. It is comforting, however, and a source of profound relief to think that man is only a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old, a new wrinkle in our knowledge, an that he will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form.12

The prophetic note at the end of the passage given above forebodes an end to this anthropological episteme too, with a decentering of ‘man’ from knowledge. Foucault shows, later in the book, how in his times, the sudden growth in emphasis on psychoanalysis, ethnology, and linguistics, as opposed to the three corresponding human sciences, probably heralds the coming of a new episteme, one of what he calls ‘counter-sciences’. Foucault ends the ‘Preface’ not only by stressing once more his purpose of exposing the non-essentialness of order in a situation full of disorders, but prophesying the imminent end of the ‘modern’ episteme in our current times. He says, summing up, ‘In attempting to uncover the deepest strata of Western culture, I am restoring to our silent and apparently immobile soil its rifts, its instability, its flaws; and it is the same ground that is once more stirring under our feet.’13

The topic of the book is now more or less clear. Its underlying thesis is that discursive formations accumulate under the three domains of mentality, materiality and physicality (or words, things, and life) according to the order that an episteme imposes on a culture at a certain period, and that the nature of this order can be unearthed through an archaeological method, aimed at the depths of an essential disorder. At a more concrete level, this book shows how the formation of knowledge in these three domains changes in post-Renaissance Europe from a relatively non-differentiated triad comprising study of languages, astronomy and geography, and the study of living forms during the Renaissance to the really tripartite general grammar-analysis of wealth-natural history formation during the Classical age. It shows further, how this triad transforms into philology-economics-biology in the nineteenth century, and literary studies-sociology- psychology under the human sciences, and is currently in the process of being changed further into a linguistics-ethnology-psychoanalysis one. With this background information, we can now proceed to the contents of the book.

12 Ibid., xxiii.
13 Ibid., xxiv.
II. The Prose of the World: Order of Things during the Renaissance

a. Resemblance and its Types

Foucault begins his book with an entire chapter dedicated to a discussion of Velázquez’s painting Las Meninas, which he describes as the epitome of the Classical concept of representation. I would find its perusal a bit of an indulgence, especially in the light of the limited space this thesis can dedicate to the text. Accordingly, I propose to move straightaway to Foucault’s discussion of the ordering of things during the Renaissance, when, for him, the notion of resemblance ruled the roost, and similitude to the ‘real’ world was the hallmark for discourses. Highlighting this status of resemblance in the Renaissance mode of thought, and showing how this principle constituted all modes of discourse, Foucault says,

Up to the end of the sixteenth century, resemblance played a constructive role in the knowledge of Western culture. It was resemblance that largely guided exegesis and the interpretation of texts; it was resemblance that organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them. The universe was folded in upon itself: the earth echoing the sky, faces seeing themselves reflected in the stars and plants holding within their stems secrets that were of use to man. Painting imitated space. And representation—whether in the service of pleasure or knowledge—was positioned as a form of repetition: the theatre of life or the mirror of nature, that was the claim made by all languages, its manner of declaring its existence and of formulating its right of speech.\(^{14}\)

The discursive universe of the Renaissance had to be, thus, a reflection of the world itself, so that discursive formations during the period were nothing more than what Foucault calls ‘the prose of the world’, a verisimilitudinal and quite prosaic presentation of the tangible world.

Having established the importance of resemblance in the Renaissance episteme, Foucault proceeds next to provide a typology of the same. Resemblance in the Renaissance was mainly of four types: convenientia, aemulatio, analogy, and the play of sympathies, and he chooses to describe them, one by one. Convenientia is established when two objects attain resemblance because of their adjacency, as though by induction. Aemulatio is the resemblance that objects achieve without the convenience of adjacency. Objects, which are not in actual contact, can emulate each other and become resemblant from a distance. Analogy is a sort of a combination of the two, where two basically unrelated objects, can become so resemblant that they almost form a convenient relation of adjacency. Through this third type of resemblance, objects can form between themselves 'more subtle resemblances of relations'.\(^{15}\) The fourth type of resemblance is not content in making similitudes appear between restrictive sets of objects, but through an ever-flowing play of sympathies permeate all objects, making each potentially resemblant of the other, as though by radiation.


\(^{15}\) Ibid., 21.
b. The Great Resemblance: Signatures of the Macrocosm

It appears from this selfsame model of a fourfold play of resemblances, that the whole world, from the minutest objects subject to *convenientia* to the cosmological objects of *sympathies*, is caught up in a closed similitudinal space, from which there is no escape in the form of 'removed' representations. However, the system of resemblances is not all that closed and, paradoxically, the very fact of omnipresent similitude provides signs the scope to enter Renaissance discourse. If similitude is the way of the world, then the world must also resemble something, the world, and in its things, must be nothing but a reflection of a greater cosmological world, that of God. The similitude of every earthly thing with this heavenly superiority must be indicated, in the form of decodable signs, on its surface. For Foucault,

And yet the system is not closed. One aperture remains: and through it the whole interplay of resemblances would be in danger of escaping from itself, or of remaining hidden in darkness, if there were not a further form of similitude to close the circle—to render it at once perfect and manifest... These buried similitudes must be indicated on the surface of things; there must be visible marks for the invisible analogies... There are no resemblances without signatures. The world of similarity can only be a world of signs... A knowledge of similitudes is founded upon the unearthing and deciphering of these signatures.16

This brings in the concept of 'signatures' or signs into the Renaissance *episteme*, and similitude gets validated only in respect to the significative nature of objects. This superimposition of signatures and similitude gets carried to such an extremity, that Foucault shows how in Renaissance medicine, aconite seeds were considered good for the eyes and walnut good for the brain because they resembled eyes and the brain, respectively, their hidden signatures, in terms of their meditative values, being decidable only through their resemblances. During the Renaissance, a quest for meaning, or signs, was, thus inextricably connected to a search for resemblances, and the two together formed an inalienable double. Foucault shows the totalizing effects of this epistemological configuration when he explains how both the branches of knowledge that study signs—hermeneutics, or the means to decode the meaning of a sign, and semiology, or the means to study how these signs get constituted—curve back upon the single category of resemblance.

Let us call the totality of the learning and skills that enable one to make the signs speak and to discover their meaning, hermeneutics; let us call the totality of the learning and skills that enable one to distinguish the location of the signs, to define what constitutes them as signs, and to know how and by what laws they are linked, semiology: the sixteenth century superimposed hermeneutics and semiology in the form of similitude. To search for a meaning is to bring to light a resemblance. To search for the law governing signs is to discover the things that are alike.17

During the Renaissance, thus signatures make an appearance, side by side with the unitary of logic of similitude, but the signifier and the signified tend to coalesce, under the pressures of the *episteme*, to one composite whole, justified by the resemblance between them.

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16 Ibid., 25-26.
17 Ibid., 29.
It has already been stated that signs come in existence in the Renaissance *episteme* because of a desired similitude between the tangible world and the cosmos. This brings into play the ancient categories of the microcosm and the macrocosm. By the sixteenth century, the notion that the world is a microcosmic version of a celestial macrocosm comes to play a fundamental role in the field of knowledge, by providing knowledge with the definiteness of its all-encompassing scope, as well as the ultimate limitation of its nature. Foucault says,

The fact is that it had one, or rather two, precise functions in the epistemological configuration of the period. As a category of thought, it applies the interplay of duplicated resemblances to all the realms of nature; it provides all investigation with an assurance that everything will find its mirror and its macrocosmic justification on another and larger scale... But, understood as a general configuration of nature, it poses real and, as it were, tangible limits to the indefatigable to-and-for of similitudes relieving one another. It indicates that there exists a greater world, and that its perimeter defines the limit of all created things... Nature, like the interplay of signs and resemblances, is closed in upon itself in conformity with the duplicated form of the cosmos... In an *episteme* in which signs and similitudes were wrapped around one another in an endless spiral, it was essential that the relation of microcosm to macrocosm should be conceived as both the guarantee of that knowledge and the limit of its expansion.18

The idea of the microcosm, thus, acts as the most fundamental constituent of the Renaissance *episteme*, it providing the space and the limits of knowledge for the age. The apparent contradiction between exact sciences and magic or alchemy, both of which flourished during the Renaissance, lies solved, for Foucault, in the primacy of the notion of the microcosm. It was the necessity to identify the limits of the bond between the tangible world and its imperceptible macrocosm that obliged Renaissance knowledge to accept both magic and erudition at the same level, making *eruditio* and *divinatio* part of the same hermeneutics.

c. *The Epistemic Triad in the Renaissance*

The Renaissance forms of knowledge have been presented in terms of all the characteristics of an *episteme*—that there is one principle of resemblances that orders all knowledge during the period, that the principle itself sets the scope and limits for knowledge within it, and that it can bring apparently contrary bodies of knowledge like science and magic under its unitary rule—and Foucault moves on next to showing how the mental-material-physical triad works itself out during the Renaissance. The Renaissance *episteme* being constructed around the decoding of resemblances and signatures, it is the mental counterpart of language that gains primacy in the then tripartition of modes of knowledge. The physical domain of life, as evident in nature and its living forms, and the material domain of things, represented in the knowledge of the world and the universe, have to be dependent on this mental domain of signs and similitudes in language. Showing how, in spite of this total reliance on grammar, studies of nature and the universe for with it a triad, Foucault says,

18 Ibid., 31-32.
Language partakes in the world-wide dissemination of similitudes and signatures. It must, therefore, be studied itself as a thing in nature. Like animals, plants, or stars, its elements have their laws of affinity and convenience, their necessary analogies. The study of grammar in the sixteenth century is based upon the same epistemological arrangement as the science of nature or the esoteric disciplines. Language stands halfway between the visible forms of nature and the secret conveniences of esoteric discourse.

Knowledge therefore consisted in relating one form of language to another, that of the use of human speech to decode relations of resemblance in the domain of nature and the universe. The function proper to knowledge in the Renaissance is interpreting, and just as verbal commentary interprets the domain of mental constructs, study of nature, in terms of both the living beings and the things that house in it, traces the everlasting play of resemblances within the Renaissance episteme. For Foucault,

It will be seen that the experience of language belongs to the same archaeological network as the knowledge of things and nature. The commentary resembles endlessly that which it is commenting upon and which it can never express; just as the knowledge of nature [both in terms of things and living forms] constantly finds new signs for resemblance because resemblance cannot be known in itself, even though the signs can never be anything but similitudes.

This well-knit episteme, where the three domains of discursive formation present themselves in such a coherent triad formed under the governing glance of similitude, was, however, soon to collapse, under its own weight, giving rise to the next epistemological configuration of the Classical age.

d. Don Quixote and the Limits of Resemblance

It has already been stated how during the Renaissance, the traditional tripartite model of signification—that there is a signifier, a signified, and the conjoining act of signification—gives way to a monolithic model where the three collapse into one single form under the totalizing demands of similitude. This possible collapse of a ternary form heralds the potentials of its reduction and, combined with the growing importance of the sign in the Renaissance episteme, it soon leads to a binarization of the sign, making modes of knowledge pass over to the next episteme of the Classical age. Foucault shows how the Renaissance episteme thus collapses under the weight of its own categories of the sign and its unification:

Ever since the Stoics, the system of signs in the Western world had been a ternary one, for it was recognized as containing the significant, the signified and the 'conjuncture' (the τὸ σχήμα). From the seventeenth century, on the other hand, the arrangement of signs was to become binary, since it was to be defined, with Port-Royal, as the connection of a significant and a signified. At the Renaissance, the organization is different...since resemblance is the form of the signs as well as their content, the three distinct elements of this articulation are resolved into a single form.

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19 Ibid., 35.
20 Ibid., 41-42.
21 Ibid., 42.
For Foucault, the limits of resemblance and the heralding of a new *episteme* are best represented in the limit-Renaissance work—*Don Quixote* (1605). The figure of Don Quixote is one that moves around in the problematized world of resemblances, where windmills signify dragons no more, and where, in spite of all the semblant trappings of a knight, he can become one only by appropriating the representational space of narratives and the law. The story is thus of similitude giving way to the emergent rules of representation:

> With all their twists and turns, Don Quixote’s adventures form the boundary: they mark the end of the old interplay between resemblance and signs and contain the beginnings of new relations... His whole being is nothing but language, text, printed pages, stories that have already been written down. He is made up of interwoven words; he is writing itself, wandering through the world among the resemblances of things. Yet not entirely so: for in his reality as an impoverished hidalgo he can become a knight only by listening from afar to the age-old epic that gives its form to Law... if he is to resemble the texts of which he is the witness, the representation, the real analogue, Don Quixote must also furnish proof and provide the indubitable sign that they are telling the truth. that they really are the language of the world. it is incumbent upon him to fulfil the promise of the books... Don Quixote reads the world in order to prove his books. And the only proofs he gives himself are the glittering reflections of resemblances. 22

Don Quixote is the negative of the Renaissance world, where writing has ceased to be the prose of the world, and resemblances and signs have dissolved their former alliance. However, this does not impoverish language but make it even more dominant, with all the powers of the new *episteme* being formed lying solely with it. This eclipse of the real world under the sign is what happens in the second part of *Don Quixote*, where the protagonist meets people who have read the first book and recognize him, and he has to live up to the image that the book has formed of him. It is thus no more signs that imitate things and try to be similar to them, but real things that have to emulate signs and shape themselves up:

> Yet language has not become entirely impotent. It now possesses new powers, and powers peculiar to it alone. In the second part of the novel, Don Quixote meets characters who have read the first part of his story and recognize him, the real man, as the hero of the book... Having first read so many books that he became a sign, a sign wandering through a world that did not recognize him, he has now, despite himself and without his knowledge, become a book that contains his truth, that records exactly all that he has done or said and seen and thought, and that at last makes him recognizable, so closely does he resemble all those signs whose ineffaceable imprint he has left behind him... Don Quixote’s truth is not in the relation of the words to the world but in that slender and constant relation woven between themselves by verbal signs. The hollow fiction of epic exploits has become the representative power of language. Words have swallowed up their own nature as signs. 23

It is under this totalizing dialectic of signs and representation, that the new *episteme* ushers in, and Classical age is born. The prose of the world is dissolved for ever, as is the constitutive category of similitudes. The three domains of mentality, materiality and physicality have to be thoroughly refurbished under the new epistemological configurations of the eighteenth century, to give rise to a new order of things.

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III. The Primacy of Representation: Order of Things in the Classical Age

a. From Resemblance to Comparison

As has been stated in the earlier section, the epistemological validity of similitude starts getting questioned right from within the Renaissance. Foucault shows how at the beginning of the seventeenth century, during the Baroque period, similitude was already perceived as no longer the form of knowledge but rather the occasion of error. He also cites important seventeenth century thinkers like Bacon and Descartes to show how a critique of similitude starts gaining momentum in seventeenth century Europe. Foucault states how Bacon critiqued resemblance as an epistemological mode belonging to the order of idolatry:

We already find a critique of resemblance in Bacon—an empirical critique that concerns, not the relations of order and the equality between things, but the types of mind and the forms of illusion to which they might be subject. We are dealing with a doctrine of the quid pro quo. Bacon does not dissipate similitudes by means of evidence and its attendant rules. He shows them, shimmering before our eyes, vanishing as one draws near, then re-forming again a moment later, a little further off. They are idols.24

The Cartesian criticism is of a more methodological type, where resemblance becomes a false means to knowledge because of its confused use of ‘analogy’ as a means. For Descartes, a more systematic form of analogy, comparison, should replace the regime of similitude with its structure of identities and differences, of measurement and order. Foucault says,

The Cartesian critique of resemblance is of another type. It is no longer sixteenth century thought becoming troubled as it contemplates itself and beginning to jettison its most familiar forms; it is Classical thought excluding resemblance as the fundamental experience and primary form of knowledge, denouncing it as a confused mixture that must be analysed in terms of identity, difference, measurement, and order. Though Descartes rejects resemblance, he does so not by excluding the act of comparison from rational thought, not even by seeking to limit it, but on the contrary by universalizing it and thereby giving it its purest form.25

Thus, comparison becomes a very important category, because it is the one that connects, as well as distinguishes, the Renaissance and the Classical epistemes. For Foucault, there exist two forms of comparison: the comparison of measurement and that of order. The first is the comparison of two sizes or two multiplicities according to a common unit, reducible to the arithmetical relations of equality and inequality. The comparison of measurement, thus, enables one to analyse ‘similar’ things according to the calculable form of identity and difference. The comparison of order, on the other hand, is established without reference to an exterior unit, but by discovering that which is the simplest, then that which is the next simplest, and thus progressing to the most complex things of all. The comparison of order, thus, makes the appearance of ‘elements’ possible in discourse. Putting the two types of comparison in perspective, Foucault says,

24 Ibid., 51.
25 Ibid., 52.
Such, then, are the two types of comparison: the one analyses into units in order to establish relations of equality and inequality; the other establishes elements, the simplest that can be found, and arranges differences according to the smallest possible degrees. Now, it is possible to use the measurement of sizes and multiplicities in establishing an order; arithmetical values can always be arranged according to a series... And it is precisely in this that the method and its 'progress' consist: the reduction of all measurement (all determination by equality and inequality) to a serial arrangement which, beginning from the simplest, will show up all difference as degrees of complexity.26

The two types of comparison are, thus, not unrelated, and together, they form the epistemic foundation of a new age, together make 'progress' in thought take place. The holistic import of this twofold epistemic category thus makes the singularly intent configuration of the next episteme appear, where elements of the world would be available, classified in measure, to be stringed hierarchically into a great qualitatively progressive chain.

This newly acquired status for comparison was, thus, of utter importance for the new episteme. While one the one hand, it replaced resemblance with the new dialectic of identity and difference, on the other, it replaced the erstwhile worldly locus of order with order locatable in thought. This was how, for Foucault, Rationalism was born:

All this was of the greatest consequence to Western thought. Resemblance, which had for long been the fundamental category of knowledge—both the form and content of what we know—became dissociated in an analysis based on terms of identity and difference; moreover, whether indirectly by the intermediary of measurement, or directly and, as it were, on the same footing, comparison became a function of order; and lastly, comparison ceased to fulfil the function of revealing how the world is ordered, since it was now accomplished according to the order laid down by thought, progressing naturally from the simple to the complex. As a result, the entire episteme of Western culture found its fundamental arrangements modified... This new configuration may, I suppose, be called 'rationalism'... 27

The premium put on comparison led to four major consequences. First, this led to a substitution of analysis for the hierarchy of analogies; so that a resemblance will not be accepted until its identity and the series of its differences are discovered by means of measurement with a common unit, or by its position in an order. Secondly, the interplay of similitudes was earlier infinite, with an everlasting possibility of discovering new ones, while a complete enumeration would be possible in the new mode of thought, which permits an absolutely certain knowledge of identities and differences. Thirdly, the activity of the mind will no longer consist in drawing things together, but, on the contrary, in discriminating, that is, in establishing their identities in relation to differences. Finally, this foregrounding of discrimination leads to, as a fourth consequence, a dissociation between history and science, with language losing its earlier privileged all-encompassing ontological position in favour of a new neutral epistemic stature. Foucault, in his comment about this fourth consequence, says,

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26 Ibid., 53-54.
27 Ibid., 54.
Lastly, a final consequence, since to know is to discriminate, history and science will become separated from one another... This being so, the written word ceases to be included among the signs and forms of truth; language is no longer one of the figurations of the world, or a signature stamped upon things since the beginning of time. The manifestation and sign of truth are to be found in evident and distinct perception. It is the task of words to translate that truth if they can; but they no longer have the right to be considered a mark of it. Language has withdrawn from the midst of beings themselves and has entered a period of transparency and neutrality.28

b. The Dual Sign, the Table and the New Triad

The category of comparison and the 'neutral' status that language acquires in the Classical episteme, converge to accord primacy to the notion of order, and the entity called sign. But, the sign, by its very nature poses a duality. On the one hand, it arises from comparison and order, and yet, on the other, similitude has to play an indispensable part in its construction, because no equality or relation of order can be established between two things unless their resemblance occasions their comparison. Thus, the sign is always torn between two features of its identity. As Foucault says,

This relation to Order is as essential to the Classical age as the relation to Interpretation was to the Renaissance. And just as interpretation in the sixteenth century, with its superimposition of a semiology upon a hermeneutics, was essentially a knowledge based upon similitude, so the ordering of things by means of signs constitutes all empirical forms of knowledge as knowledge based upon identity and difference. The simultaneously endless and closed, full and tautological world of resemblance now finds itself dissociated and, as it were, split down the middle: on the one side, we shall find the signs that have become tools of analysis, marks of identity and difference, principles whereby things can be reduced to order, keys for a taxonomy; and, on the other, the empirical and murmuring resemblance of things, that unreacting similitude that lies beneath thought and furnishes the infinite raw material for divisions and distributions. On the one hand, the general theory of signs, divisions, and classifications; on the other, the problem of immediate resemblances, of the spontaneous movement of the imagination, of nature's repetitions. And between the two, the new forms of knowledge that occupy the area opened up by this new split.29

This dual nature of the sign has two implications, both of which have deep impact on the Classical episteme. On the one hand, it implies the Classical binarization of the sign into an ordered set of limited signifiers and an unlimited possibility of resemblant signifieds. On the other hand, the duality takes Classical knowledge in two apparently divergent directions—that of a calculable order, as well as a distant point of original resemblances.

Taking up the first implication first, Foucault shows how the Classical binary arrangement of the sign makes a 'duplicated representation' appear as a major category:

The binary arrangement of the sign, as it appears in the seventeenth century...presupposes that the sign is a duplicated representation doubled over upon itself... From the Classical age, the sign is the representativity of the representation in so far as it is representable.30

28 Ibid., 55-56.
29 Ibid., 57-58.
30 Ibid., 64-65.
Thus, though ‘semiology’ and ‘hermeneutics’ are superimposed, as in the sixteenth century, in the Classical age they no longer meet and join in the third element of resemblance, their connection lying in that innate power proper to representation of representing itself. It is within this overreaching rule of representation, that the new triad of the Classical age is formed. General grammar, natural history, and analysis of wealth, the three forms of knowledge in the Classical domains of mentality, physicality, and materiality are all governed by the dual representation of the sign. For Foucault,

This is why the analysis of language, from Lancelot to Destutt de Tracy, is conducted on the basis of an abstract theory of verbal signs and in the form of a general grammar: but it always takes the meaning of words as its guiding thread; it is also why natural history manifests itself as an analysis of the characters of living beings, and why, nevertheless, the taxonomies used, artificial though they may be, are always intended to unite with the natural order, or at least to dissociate it as little as possible; it is also why the analysis of wealth is conducted on the basis of money and exchange, but value is always based upon need. In the Classical age, the pure science of signs has value as the direct discourse of that which is signified. The duality of the sign thus foments its binarization; the binary nature, in itself, promotes dual representation as a constitutive category; and the premium put on representation, in turn, shapes the trichotomized domain of ideas into a particular triad within the Classical episteme.

Coming to the second implication of the dual nature of the sign, it is easily conceivable how it is constantly pulled, on the hand, in the direction of a calculable order, and on the other in the direction of original resemblances. The first gives rise to what Foucault calls a mathesis, or the insistence that knowledge of things can be constituted through a universal algebra. And, the incongruities of the second with the first are resolved in genesis, or a search for origins, either in the form of the supreme moment of inception (as in Descartes, Malebranche, or Spinoza), or in the form of the imperfect yet innocent ‘zero-state’ (as in Rousseau, Condillac, or Hume). Explaining this latter formation, Foucault says,

Now, these two opposing stages (the first the negative one of the disorder in nature and in our impressions, the other the positive one of the power to reconstitute order out of those impressions) are united in the idea of a ‘genesis’. And this in two possible ways. Either the negative stage (that of disorder and vague resemblance) is attributed to the imagination itself... The power of imagination is only the inverse, the other side, of its defect. It exists within man, at the suture of body and soul. It is there that Descartes, Malebranche, and Spinoza analysed it, both as the locus of error and as the power of attaining to truth, even mathematical truth... Alternatively, the positive stage of imagination can be attributed to shifting resemblances and the vague murmur of similitudes. It is the disorder of nature due to its own history, to its catastrophes, or perhaps merely to its jumbled plurality, which is no longer capable of providing representation with anything but things that resemble one another... It is in any case understandable that the second type of analysis should have so easily been deployed in the mythical form of the first man (Rousseau), or that of the awakening consciousness (Condillac), or that of the stranger suddenly thrust into the world (Hume): this genesis functioned exactly instead of and in place of Genesis itself.
Thus at one end of the Classical spectrum of knowledge lies a *mathesis*, or the search for the incalculable, and at the other lies a *genesis*, or the search for the origin. Foucault shows how between these two lies the world of *taxinomia*, or the table, where all elements of knowledge can be arranged as signs in a system of order. And, it is within this ordered space of the *table*, that the three formations of general grammar, natural history, and analysis of wealth appear on the Classical horizon. For Foucault,

Between the *mathesis* and the *genesis* there extends the region of signs—of signs that span the whole domain of empirical representation, but never extend beyond it. Hedged in by calculus and genesis, we have the area of the *table...* It is in this area that we encounter *natural history*—the science of the characters that articulate the continuity and the tangle of nature. It is also in this area that we encounter the *theory of money* and the *theory of value*—the science of the signs that authorize exchange and permit the establishment of equivalences between men’s needs or desires. Lastly, it is also in this region that we find *general grammar*—the science of the signs by means of which men group together their individual perceptions and pattern the continuous flow of their thoughts. Despite their differences, these three domains existed in the Classical age only in so far as the fundamental area of the ordered table was established between the calculation of equalities and the genesis of representations.

Thus, the second implication of the dual nature of the sign provides the triad with its second feature, that of its constituents being ordered in the forms of a table on a space of signs.

Having identified the forms that discursive formations in the three domains of mentality, materiality, and physicality take in the Classical age, and having also identified the basic common features of these three positivities within the current episteme—that they are of the order of representation, and that they are ordered like a table—one can now proceed to examine how Foucault discusses the three elements of the Classical triad, one by one.

c. *General Grammar: the Classical Order of Words*

The first point that Foucault makes in his description of the Classical order of words is the distinction between the Renaissance approach to language and the eighteenth century one. While in the former period, language is revered as the mark of the macrocosm, in the latter, it assumes nothing more than a representational role—it becomes discourse.

The Renaissance came to a halt before the brute fact that language existed...marks made upon manuscripts or pages of books. And all these insistent marks summoned up a secondary language—that of commentary, exegesis, erudition... From the seventeenth century, it is this massive and intriguing existence of language that is eliminated. It no longer appears hidden in the enigma of the mark... From an extreme point of view, one might say that language in the Classical era does not exist. But that it functions: its whole existence is located in its representational role... Language has no other locus, no other value, than in representation... henceforth, the primary Text is effaced, and with it, the entire, inexhaustible foundation of the words whose mute being was inscribed in things: all that remains is representation, unfolding in the verbal signs that manifest it, and hence becoming *discourse.*

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Thus, *commentary*, which was so fundamental to the Renaissance yields in the Classical age to *criticism*, the difference of which with commentary in the same as that of the analysis of a visible form with the discovery of a hidden content. Criticism questions language as a pure function, a totality of mechanisms, and a great autonomous play of signs, questioning, at the same time, its truth or falsehood, and whether what it says is present in the words by which it represents it. This insistence of criticism on treating language like discourse, leads to the new epistemological configuration of 'general grammar'. As Foucault points out,

> Once the existence of language has been eliminated, all that remains is its function in representation: its nature and its virtues as *discourse*... It is here that we find that new epistemological domain that the Classical age called 'general grammar'. It would be nonsense to see this purely and simply as the application of a language to the theory of language. But it would be equally nonsensical to attempt to interpret it as a sort of pre-figuration of a linguistics. *General grammar is the study of verbal order in its relation to the simultaneity that it is its task to represent.* Its proper object is therefore neither thought nor any individual language, but *discourse*, understood as a sequence of verbal signs. 35

After delineating the primary cause behind the emergence of 'general grammar', Foucault proceeds to highlight its four major consequences. The first was that 'general grammar' divided the sciences of language in the Classical period into two disciplines: rhetoric, which deals with *figures* and *tropes* and the manner in which language is spatialized in verbal signs; and grammar, which deals with articulation and order. The second consequence was that grammar, as reflection upon language in general, started expressing, in the Classical age, the relation between language and universality, laying the foundation for the possibility of a universal language and an *Encyclopaedia*. As Foucault says,

> There must exist within it at least the possibility of a language that will gather into itself, between its words, the totality of the world, and, inversely, the world, as the totality of what is representable, must be able to become, in its totality, an *Encyclopaedia*. 36

Thirdly, knowledge and language get rigorously interwoven in the Classical episteme, complementing and criticising one another incessantly, in their realization of the same origin and the same functional principle they share in representation. The final consequence of general grammar is that of a changed relation between language and time. For the sixteenth century, languages succeeded one another in history and were capable of engendering one another; but, for the seventeenth century, the relation of language to time is inverted. Time can no longer allot languages their places; it is language that arranges representations and words in a sequence according to typologies of order. After general grammar, each language defines its specificity by means of this internal order, and the positions it allots to its words, and not by virtue of its place in a historical series.

The next thing that Foucault does is to underline the basic elements in general grammar. For him, the theory of language of this body of thought was constituted around four functions: proposition, designation, articulation, and derivation. I will now take these up, one by one. For general grammar, proposition is the most elemental category in language formation. Foucault shows how, for this theory, language is created in the proposition:

The proposition is to language what representation is to thought, at once its most general and most elementary form, since as soon as it is broken down we no longer encounter the discourse but only its elements, in the form of so much raw material. Below the proposition we do indeed find words, but it is not in them that language is created. In a proposition, the functions of the language are led back to three elements that are indispensable to the formation of a proposition: the subject, the predicate, and the link between them. Within the propositional space, however, the subject and the predicate are of the same nature, since the task of the proposition is to connect them. The only difference, thus, is that manifested by the verb, and it becomes the indispensable condition for all discourse. Because of this primacy of the verb in the theory of proposition, as opposed to secondary definitions of the verb in terms of tenses (as in Aristotle), action (as in Scaliger), or persons (as in Buxtorf), the prime function of the verb within general grammar, becomes ‘affirmation’; ‘to be’ becomes the archetypal verb. Foucault says,

It is this function that we must now examine—by stripping the verb of all that has constantly overlaid and obscured it. We must not stop, as Aristotle did, at the fact that the verb signifies tenses (there are many other words, adverbs, adjectives, nouns, that can carry temporal significations). Nor must we stop, as Scaliger did, at the fact that it expresses actions and passions, whereas nouns denote things—and permanent things (for there is precisely the very noun ‘action’ to be considered). Nor must we attach importance, as Buxtorf did, to the different persons of the verb, for these can also be designated by certain pronouns. What we must do before all else is to reveal, in all clarity, the essential function of the verb: the verb affirms... A proposition exists—and discourse too—when we affirm the existence of an attributive link between two things, when we say that this is that. The entire species of the verb may be reduced to the single verb that signifies to be.

But, when the grammarians of Port-Royal said that the function of the verb to be was affirmation, they did not mean that the verb to be contains the idea of affirmation, but rather that it provides the affirmation of the idea, the supremacy of the ideal representational space. Thus, the essential function of the verb to be, and therefore by extension of all verbs and all propositions, is to relate language to the representation that it designates. This is how proposition, the first of the four elements that constitute the Classical model of language, returns self-reflexively to its governing principle, representation, and the Classical foray into the domain of mentality, as through words, shows itself to be caught up in the overwhelming dialectic of the sign and its representative function—of the table and its order.

37 Ibid., 92.
38 Ibid., 93-94.
The next two elements are related. The first one, that of designation, has to do with nouns, or that just as proposition points to the verb, this function assigns names to all the objects of the world, thus providing ground for endless differentiation. Foucault says,

The word designates, that is, in its very nature it is a noun or name. A proper noun, since it is directed always towards a particular representation, and towards no other. So, in contrast to the uniformity of the verb, which is never more than the universal expression of attribution, nouns proliferate in endless differentiation. However, as one might notice, every single object does not have a singular designation to it; the common noun groups in classes different objects, and gives one name to a class. This is the function of articulation. This generality may be acquired in two ways: either by a horizontal articulation, grouping together individuals that have certain identities in common and separating those that are different; or by a vertical articulation, where a qualitative distinction is achieved between things that subsist by themselves and those that can never meet them in an independent state. This is how, using the categories of the proper noun and adjectives, articulation generates common nouns in a language. For Foucault,

The primary articulation of language (if we leave aside the verb to be, which is as much a condition of discourse as it is a part of it) is thus aligned along two orthogonal axes: one proceeding from the individual unit to the general; the other proceeding from the substance to the quality. At their point of intersection stands the common noun; at one extremity the proper noun, at the other the adjective.

One more interesting feature of language is that meanings assigned to a word keep on changing. The question as to how designations, which are articulated within representation, can move away from their original signification and acquire either a broader or more limited meaning, and how words can change not only their forms but also their field of application, is answered by general grammar through the category of derivation. Foucault shows how, according to the Classical notion of language, this change in meanings takes place, in steps, through the three rhetorical devices of synecdoche, metonymy, and catachresis or metaphor.

Originally, everything had a name—a proper or peculiar name. Then the name became attached to a single element of the thing, and became applicable to all the other individual things that also contained that element: it is no longer a particular oak that is called tree, but anything that includes at least a trunk and branches. The name also became attached to a conspicuous circumstance: night came to designate, not the end of this particular day, but the period of darkness separating all sunsets from all dawns. Finally it attached itself to analogies: everything was called a leaf that was as thin and flexible as the leaf of a tree. The progressive analysis and more advanced articulation of language, which enable us to give a single name to several things, were developed along the lines of these three fundamental figures so well known to rhetoric: synecdoche, metonymy, and catachresis (or metaphor, if the analogy is less immediately perceptible).

This is how general grammar constructs its model of language around four related functions.

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30 Ibid., 97.
31 Ibid., 98.
40 Ibid., 113-114.
For Foucault, these four theories form amongst themselves 'the quadrilateral of language', with proposition, articulation, designation, and derivation occupying its four vertices respectively, in terms of relations of opposition and reciprocal reinforcement in pairs in this sequence. Elaborating this basic model of the Classical notion of language, he says,

The four theories—of the proposition, of articulation, of designation, and of derivation—form, as it were, the segments of a quadrilateral. They confront each other in pairs and reinforce each other in pairs. Articulation gives content to the pure and still empty verbal form of the proposition; it fills that form, yet is in opposition to it, as a nomination that differentiates things is in opposition to the predication that links them together. The theory of designation reveals the point of attachment of all the nominal forms cut out by articulation; but they are in opposition to articulation, just as the instantaneous, gestural, perpendicular designation is in opposition to patterns based on generalities. The theory of derivation indicates the continuous movement of words from their source of origin, but the slipping that occurs on the surface of representation is in opposition to the single stable bond that links one root to one representation. Finally, derivation leads back to the proposition, since without it all designation would remain folded in on itself and could never acquire the generality that alone can authorize a predicing link; yet derivation is made by means of a spatial figure, whereas the proposition unfolds in obedience to a sequential and linear order.42

For Foucault, there also exist diagonal relations between the opposing corners of this quadrilateral. The line between articulation and derivation marks off the state of a language in terms of its articulative capacities determined by the distance it has moved along the line of derivation. The other diagonal runs from the proposition to designation, and the relation of words to what they represent is established along this axis. At the centre of the quadrilateral, where the two diagonals meet, lies the seat of name, the entity that can occupy a position in the taxonomic table. Foucault shows how the classical episteme bases its entire theory of the mental construct that language is around this central privileged entity of the name:

At the point where these two diagonals intersect, at the centre of the quadrilateral, where the duplicating process of representation is revealed as analysis, where the substitute has the power of distribution, and where, in consequence, there resides the possibility and the principle of a general taxonomy of representation, there is the name... The entire Classical theory of language is organized around this central and privileged entity... Around the privileged position occupied by the name in the Classical period, the theoretical segments (proposition, articulation, designation, and derivation) constitute the frontiers of what the experience of language was at that time.43

Returning, to the features of the Classical episteme, where everything has to be representable, and classifiable as an element in taxinomia, Foucault ends his discussion by showing how it is around this central category of 'name' that the whole of Classical discourse revolves.

The fundamental task of Classical 'discourse' is to ascribe a name to things, and in that name to name their being. For two centuries, Western discourse was the locus of ontology. When it named the being of all representation in general, it was philosophy: theory of knowledge and analysis of ideas. When it ascribed to each thing represented the name that was fitted to it, and laid out the grid of a well-made language across the whole field of representation, then it was science—nomenclature and taxonomy.44

42 Ibid., 115.
43 Ibid., 116-19.
44 Ibid., 120.
d. Natural History: the Classical Order of Life

For Foucault, the particular mode in which the Classical episteme studied the domain of physicality was the positivity of natural history, which was different from the subsequent mode of biology, in the fact that the former was not really a science of life, but one of living things arranged in a representative table. Foucault says,

> Historians want to write histories of biology in the eighteenth century; but they do not realize that biology did not exist then, and that the pattern of knowledge that has been familiar to us for a hundred and fifty years is not valid for a previous period. And that, if biology was unknown, there was a very simple reason for it: that life itself did not exist. All that existed was living beings, which were viewed through grid of knowledge constituted by natural history.  

It is often believed that the history of nature appeared only when Cartesian mechanism ebbed, because, apparently, the complexity of vegetable and animal kingdoms can manifest itself in all its richness only when it is impossible to fit the entire world into the laws of rectilinear movement. For Foucault, however, natural history, with Ray, Jonston, and Christophorus Knauth, is contemporaneous with Cartesianism itself, and he goes on to show how Mechanism from Descartes to d’Alembert and Natural History from Tournefort to Daubenton were authorized by the same episteme.

To bring to light the important characteristics of this new positivity, Foucault begins by contrasting it with the study of forms of life during the Renaissance. The history of a plant or an animal, in the Renaissance, was as much a description of its elements or organs, as of the resemblances that could be found in it, legends and stories around it, its place in heraldry, its medicinal and food values, what the ancients and what travellers might have said of it—in short, the whole semantic network that connected it to the world. The division between what one sees, what others have observed and handed down, and what others imagine or naively believe—the tripartition of received data into Observation, Document, and Fable, did not exist then, because of the reason that signs were then parts of things themselves. In the seventeenth century, however, signs become modes of representation, and it is in the resultant ‘gap’ between things and words, that natural history originates. For Foucault,

> Natural history finds its locus in the gap that is now opened up between things and words—a silent gap, pure of all verbal sedimentation, and yet articulated according to the elements of representation, those same elements that can now without let or hindrance be named.

What this epistemic shift entails is a corresponding change in the epistemic status of living beings, with them being relocated from objects of wonder to categorizable and tabulable signs. Giving the example of the setting up of botanical and zoological gardens in the Classical age, Foucault shows that while exotic plants and animals had already claimed

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46 Ibid., 129-30.
people’s interest during the Renaissance, then, the strangeness of animals was a spectacle, to be featured in fairs, tournaments, and legends. The botanical or zoological gardens of the Classical period, on the other hand, replace the spectacle of the ‘show’ with the arrangement of things in a ‘table’. Natural history thus lies in the conversion of a merely visible living being into a representable sign, what Foucault calls ‘the nomination of the visible’:

...natural history has as a condition of its possibility the common affinity of things and language with representation; but it exists as a task only in so far as things and language happen to be separate. It must therefore reduce this distance between them so as to bring language as close as possible to words. Natural history is nothing more than the nomination of the visible.47

This makes the category of observation fundamental to the constitution of natural history. It was not, however, as Foucault shows, that the Classical age enhanced the scope of perception. It, on the contrary, restricted deliberately the area of its experience with a series of systematically negative conditions, excluding hearsay, taste and smell, because of their variability and lack of certainty, and limiting the sense of touch to a few fairly evident distinctions, such as that between smooth and rough. This leaves sight with an almost exclusive privilege in the Classical episteme. This area of visibility defines natural history’s condition of possibility, and seeing a few things systematically leads to a representation that can be analysed and recognized by all, and given a name to that would be understood universally. This nomination of the visible makes possible the well-made language of natural history through the invocation of the four variables of form, quantity, spatial distribution, and relative magnitude. Foucault shows how this language formation happens:

And by four variables only: the form of the elements, the quantity of those elements, the manner in which they are distributed in space in relation to each other, and the relative magnitude of each element... These four variables...specify the extension available to representation well enough for us to articulate it into a description acceptable to everyone: confronted with the same individual entity, everyone will be able to give the same description; and, inversely, given such a description everyone will be able to recognize the individual entities that correspond to it.48

Each visibly distinct part of a plant or an animal is thus describable in so far as four series of values are applicable to it. These four values together, for an organ or an organism, form what botanists term its structure, which, as a key element of the representational discourse of natural history, makes its language appear. But, if structure is to make natural history act as a language, it should also make it conform to the requirements of the quadrilateral of language, which is the epistemic watermark for any Classical representational discourse. Foucault shows how structure makes two of the four elements of the quadrilateral—proposition and articulation—appear, in the sense that this concept provides natural history its basic discursive unit and the varied elements that it can use. For Foucault, therefore,

47 Ibid., 132.
48 Ibid., 134.
In effect, description is to the object one looks at what the proposition is to the representation it expresses: its arrangement in a series, elements succeeding elements. But it will be remembered that language in its empirical form implied a theory of proposition and a theory of articulation... [For] Natural history...its propositional unfolding is indisputably an articulation; the arrangement of its elements into a linear series patterns representation according to an evident and universal mode. The theory of structure, which runs right through natural history in the Classical age, superimposes the roles played in language by the proposition and articulation in such a way that they perform one and the same function.\footnote{Ibid., 136.}

And it is by this opening of the linguistic possibility that structure links natural history to a \textit{mathesis}, reducing the whole area of the visible to a finite system of quantifiable variables ready to enter, through the sequence of a descriptive language and a universal \textit{mathesis}, the general science of order.

It would, however, be observed that the notion of the structure fails to fulfil, all by itself the tasks set by the Classical \textit{episteme}. It provides only two of the four elements of the quadrilateral, and it provides for only one of the two Classical methodological imperatives. It would, therefore be necessary for natural history to invent another category to act as designation and derivation, and also to provide the basis for a \textit{genesis}. This need is attended to, as Foucault shows by the companion category of the \textit{character}. He says,

\begin{quote}
Natural history must provide, simultaneously, a certain \textit{designation} and a controlled \textit{derivation}. And just as the theory of structure superimposed articulation and the proposition so that they became one and the same, so the theory of \textit{character} must identify the values that designate and the area in which they are derived.\footnote{Ibid., 138-39.}
\end{quote}

Character comprises those common features of an organ or an organism that can establish identities and differences between all natural entities. This appears an extremely laborious task, and involves two techniques that limit the labour of making endless comparisons. The first technique, called \textit{Method} and followed by the likes of Buffon, Adanson and Jussieu, is of making total comparisons, but within empirically constituted groups in which the number of resemblances is so high that the enumeration of differences is not all that difficult. The second procedure, termed \textit{System} and followed especially by Linnaeus, involves selecting a relatively finite and limited group of characteristics, whose variations and constants may be studied in any individual entity. The two would thus appear totally contrary in nature, the point of departure for method being a finite set of organisms and that for system being a finite set of characteristics. Foucault shows, however, that both of these spring from the same epistemic considerations, and point, in tandem to the \textit{genetic} possibility of universal tabulation:

\begin{quote}
Despite these differences, both system and method rest upon the same epistemological base. It can be defined briefly by saying that, in Classical terms, a knowledge of empirical individuals can be acquired only from the continuous, ordered, and universal tabulation of all possible differences.\footnote{Ibid., 144.}
\end{quote}
This leads one to the apparently paradoxical dual requirement of continuity as well as discontinuity in nature. While only continuity can guarantee the conversion of structure into character and the resultant completion of the Classical quadrilateral, the very fact that character have to be searched for, in terms of differences, points at a discontinuity in nature.

In the eighteenth century, the continuity of nature is a requirement of all natural history... Only continuity can guarantee that nature repeats itself and that structure can, in consequence, become character. But this requirement immediately becomes a double one. For if it was given to experience, in its uninterrupted momentum, to traverse exactly, step by step, the great continuity comprising individuals, varieties, species, genera, and classes, there would be no need to constitute a science; descriptive designations would attain to generality quite freely, and the language of things would be constituted as scientific discourse by its own spontaneous momentum. 52

To become a science, natural history must, therefore, presuppose two groupings, one of which is constituted by the continuous network of beings, and the other by the discontinuous series of events. Bringing the two together, Foucault says, "In its concrete form, and in the depth that is proper to it, nature resides wholly between the fabric of the taxinomia and the line of revolutions." 53 Thus, for Foucault, the two trends in natural history, a fixism that points towards continuity, and an evolutionism that points towards discontinuity, are products of the same episteme. Showing both to be integral to the one and the same Classical age, he says,

It will be seen how superficial it is to oppose, as two different opinions confronting one another in their fundamental options, a 'fixism' that is content to classify the beings of nature in a permanent tabulation, and a sort of an 'evolutionism' that is supposed to believe in an immemorial history of nature and a deep-rooted, onward urge of all beings throughout its continuity... They are not two ways of perceiving nature, radically opposed because deeply rooted in philosophical choices older and more fundamental than any science; they are two simultaneous requirements in the archaeological network that defines the knowledge of nature in the Classical age. 54

The notion of fixism being traditionally perceived as more 'natural' to the Classical order of living beings, Foucault discusses next, in detail, the assumptions of Classical evolutionism, and shows how this was an integral part of the then episteme, and quite different from the nineteenth century ideas of evolution.

Foucault shows that, long before Lamarck, there already existed a whole body of so-called 'evolutionist' thought in the works of Bonnet, Maupertuis, Diderot, Robinet, and Benoît de Maillet. However, for him, such analyses, being primarily concerned with linking the table of identities and differences to the series of successive events, are incompatible with what we understand today by evolutionary thought. Classical 'evolutionism' acts in two different ways. For the first system of Charles Bonnet, all the creatures arranged in taxonomy are subjected to time, not in the sense that the temporal series would give rise to a multiplicity of species, but in the sense that all the points in the taxonomy are affected by a temporal

52 Ibid., 147.
53 Ibid., 149-50.
54 Ibid., 150.
Foucault shows how, quite removed from the truly discontinuist evolutionary thought, Bonnet becomes just a performationist, adding merely, in the Leibnizian way, a continuity of time to the continuity of space, presupposing the fixist eternal chain of being. For Foucault, this ‘evolutionism’ is not a way of conceiving of the emergence of beings as a process of one giving rise to another; in reality, it is a way of generalizing the principle of continuity and the law that requires that all beings form an uninterrupted expanse. It adds, in a Leibnizian style, the continuity of time to the continuity of space, and the infiniteness of the progress of beings towards perfection to their infinite multiplicity. It is not a matter of progressive hierarchization, but of the constant and total force exerted by an already existing hierarchy. In the end this presupposes that time, far from being a principle of taxinomia, is merely one of its factors, and that it is pre-established, like all the other values assumed by all the other variables. Bonnet must, therefore, be a performanceist—and as far removed as possible from what we understand, since the nineteenth century, by ‘evolutionism’, he must suppose that the upheavals or the catastrophes of the globe were arranged in advance as so many opportunities for the infinite chain of being to continue its progress in the direction of infinite amelioration... Such a system, it is clear, is not an evolutionism beginning to overthrow the old dogma of fixism; it is a taxinomia that includes time in addition—a generalized classification.

The other form of ‘evolutionism’ gives time a completely opposite role to play in the fact that it does not move the classifying table as a whole along line of time towards perfection, but reveals, squares of characteristics, distributed at different points in time, which, when viewed together, form the continuous network of the species. This second form also, therefore, leads to a continuity in the form of unchanging basic characteristics of a species in spite of the repeated onslaught of time, and Foucault shows how both the choices of Classical ‘evolutionism’ lead to the non-evolutionary fixism of either a teleologically and progressively continuous time, or the fundamental continuity of an intentionally changing species:

We are presented, then, with another choice: either to presuppose a spontaneous aptitude in living beings to change their forms (or at least to acquire—with succeeding generations—a slightly different character form that originally given, so that it will change gradually from one to the next and finally become unrecognizable), or to attribute to them some obscure urge towards a terminal species that will possess the characters of all those that have preceded it, but in a higher degree of complexity and perfection.

This dual quasi-evolutionary schema has two consequences for natural history. The first is the necessity of introducing monsters into the scheme, to ensure a fundamental unity in the order of living beings and wish off any catastrophically discontinuous creature as an aberration. The other consequence is of searching for signs of continuity throughout organic history in the form of fossils. The monster and the fossil thus play a role in identifying trans-temporal differences and identities, thereby acting in the same way as the Classical principle that provides taxinomia first with structure, then with character. Philandering with time or discontinuity, thus yields in natural history an even stronger consolidation of the basic representative characteristics of the Classical episteme.

55 Ibid., 152.
56 Ibid., 153.
Natural history is, thus, contemporaneous with language, being on the same level as representations, and dealing with the same central privileged figure of the name. It cannot be related to biology as, up to the end of the eighteenth century, life is only one taxonomic character in the universal distribution of beings. Natural history, as a positivity within the Classical episteme, thus has less to do with a theory of life than with a theory of words. Foucault ends his discussion of the discipline by showing how only in the nineteenth century, when Kant isolates causality from the Humean schema of generality accorded to it, and dissolves the diad of identity and difference in his synthetic, that the notion of life emerges, and critical thought from Kant to Bergson permits the possibility of a science of life, i.e. biology, only in the next episteme. For Foucault,

In the late eighteenth century, a new configuration was to appear that would definitively blur the old space of natural history for modern eyes... Whereas Hume made the problem of causality one case in the general interrogation of resemblances, Kant, by isolating causality reverses the question; whereas before it was a question of establishing relations of identity or difference against the continuous background of similarities, Kant brings into prominence the inverse problem of the synthesis of the diverse... On the other hand, however, and during the same period, life assumes its autonomy in relation to the concepts of classification. It escapes from that critical relation which, in the eighteenth century, was constitutive of the knowledge of nature. It escapes—which means two things: life becomes one object of knowledge among others, and is answerable, in this respect, to all criticism in general; but it also resists this critical jurisdiction, which it takes over on its own account and brings to bear, in its own name, on all possible knowledge. So that throughout the nineteenth century, from Kant to Dilthey and to Bergson, critical forms of thought and philosophies of life find themselves in a position of reciprocal borrowing and contestation. 57

e. Analysis of Wealth: the Classical Order of Materials

Just as in the domains of language and the living beings, the Classical age does not have philology or biology, similarly, political economy does not exist in the eighteenth century, and studies in the domain of materiality is characterized by the analysis of wealth.

There is no life in the Classical period, nor any science of life; nor any philology either. But there is natural history, and general grammar. In the same way, there is no political economy, because, in the order of knowledge, production does not exist. On the other hand, there does exist in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a notion that is still familiar to us today... This domain, the ground and object of ‘economy’ in the Classical age is that of wealth. 58

Therefore, Foucault proceeds, in the same way he had in the case of general grammar or natural history, to see what the chief characteristics of this third discipline is, and how it corroborates the chief representational demands of the Classical episteme. But, before proceeding to the Classical age, Foucault first attempts to analyse the organization of money and things during the Renaissance.

57 Ibid., 162.
58 Ibid., 166.
Renaissance economic thought was restricted to the problem of monetary substance, or the price relation between various metals that can be used for coinage, and the distortion between the real value of coins and their nominal values. Quite in tune with the Renaissance reliance on similitudes, the metal appeared as the sign for measuring wealth because it was itself wealth, just as words were resemblant of what they said, and the marks of living beings were inscribed on their bodies in a visible form. The two functions of money, as a common measure between commodities and as a substitute in the mechanism of exchange, were thus based solely upon its material reality, and Renaissance determined the value of its money by the quantity of metal it contained. Foucault says,

> We are, then, presented with an arrangement analogous to that which characterizes the general organization of signs in the sixteenth century: signs, it will be remembered, were constituted by resemblances, which, in turn, necessitated further signs in order to be recognized. Here, the monetary sign cannot define its exchange value, and can be established as a mark only on a metallic mass which in turn defines its value in the scale of other commodities. If one admits that exchange, in the system of needs, corresponds to similitude in the system of acquired knowledge, then one sees that knowledge of nature, and reflection or practices concerning money, were controlled during the Renaissance by one and the same configuration of the episteme.\textsuperscript{29}

However, from within the Renaissance episteme itself, there arose two important social facts that challenged the stability of the monetary material as a standard for exchange, and ushered in the Classical notion of wealth beyond similitudes. First, the huge inflow of American metals through colonial exploits raised prices and brought down the value of European money, to reveal the fact that money is not an absolute standard for all equivalences, but a commodity whose exchange value changes according to its abundance or rarity. The second observation, formulated as Gresham’s law, or the fact that bad coinage circulates faster than coins with a high percentage of valuable metal, which are hoarded and do not take part in trade, also questioned the economic viability of retaining valuable metals in money just for similitude’s sake. The two together brought in the inevitability of representation in economy.

The old order of similitude gets replaced because of the replacement of the erstwhile feudal economic order with the emergent mode of mercantilism. Foucault says, ‘This reversal is the work of a complex of reflections and practices that occurred throughout the seventeenth century...and that are grouped together under the somewhat approximate term ‘mercantilism’.’\textsuperscript{60} This is so because under mercantilism, wealth comprises the diverse set of exchangeable and substitutable object of needs and desires, and it need not have any relationship with money apart from the representational one in the form of circulation and exchange. Foucault shows how this paradigmatic shift in focus, from the quality of money as its intrinsic price to its function in substitution for wealth, brings in the new episteme.

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., 172.
\textsuperscript{60}Ibid., 174.
For the Renaissance 'economists'... Fine metal was, of itself, a mark of wealth... It is for this reason that it had a price; for this reason too that it was a measure of all prices; and for this reason, finally, that one could exchange it for anything else that had a price... In the seventeenth century, these three properties are still attributed to money, but they are all three made to rest, not on the first (possession of price), but on the last (substitution of that which possesses price). Whereas the Renaissance based the two functions of coinage (measure and substitution) on the double nature of its intrinsic character (the fact that it was precious), the seventeenth century turns the analysis upside down: it is the exchanging function that serves as a foundation for the other two characters (its ability to measure and its capacity to receive a price thus appearing as qualities deriving from that function).61

In the Classical age, thus, all wealth is coinable, and it is by this means that it enters into circulation, just as in natural history, any being is characterizable, and can thereby find its place in a taxonomy; or in general grammar, any entity is nameable and can find its place in an articulated language. This is how the three positivities get connected through representation in a system of identities and differences to form the Classical episteme.

This new status attained by money leads to two apparently divergent Classical theories of the money. For the first, money is primarily a sign, and just as the world of representation covers itself with representations, which, in turn, represent it, so all kinds of currencies are related one to another in so far as they are all part of a system of exchange. This view comprises the 'money-as-sign faction' of the likes of Law, Terrasson, Dutot, Montesquieu, and the Chevalier de Jaucourt. For the other school of thought, money has value only when it replaces commodities and gets consumed, by the process of exchange, in providing raw materials and remunerating work. This money-as-commodity faction consisted of the likes of Paris-Duverney, the Chancelier d'Agusseau, Condillac, and Destutt de Tracy. But Foucault shows that the two schools were not all that divergent, because both rest on the single epistemic consideration of money as an object in representative exchange, thus warranting not only thinkers like Melon and Graslin, who could work somewhere between the two factions, but also at least one methodical arrangement where the two groups converge.

It is usual to construe these experiences, their theoretical context, and the discussion to which they have given rise, as the confrontation of the money-as-sign faction with the upholders of money-as-commodity... But if we investigate the knowledge that made all those various opinions simultaneously possible, we perceive that the opposition between them is superficial; and that, though it is logically necessary, it is so on the basis on a single arrangement that simply creates, at a given point, the alternatives of an indispensable choice.62

This 'single arrangement' is the definition of money as pledge, or that it is a token accepted by common consent and has exactly the same value as that for which it has been given, since it can in turn be exchanged for that same quantity of merchandise or the equivalent. Thus, though the money-as-sign faction thought that money would be made more stable if it were

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61 Ibid., 174.
62 Ibid., 180-81.
based upon some merchandise exterior to monetary specie itself, and the money-as-commodity faction thought that it would be better guaranteed if based upon a commodity constituting the material value of money, they were both relying on the operational category of pledge, and thus both conforming to demands of the Classical episteme. Foucault says,

The conflict between Law and his critics concerns only the distance between the pledge and what it is pledging. But in both cases it is money that makes it possible to fix the price of things, thanks to a certain relation of proportion with various forms of wealth and a certain power to make them circulate. 63

The correspondence between wealth, words, and characters, due to such a definitive belonging of the first to the Classical episteme, warrants a comparison of the three at two levels: that of the sign itself, and that of circulation or exchange. At the first level, Foucault shows how a single monetary element can represent several equivalent things, just as a common noun can represent several things, or a taxonomic character several species and several genera. At the second level, Foucault shows how just as representation is consolidated by the amount of derivation a language undergoes, and the extension of a character is defined by the number of species it includes, speed of circulation is defined by the number of hands through which money passes during the time it takes to return to its starting-point. But this dual requisite of money as a sign requires it to be studied at two distinct levels, as value, and as a category in trade and exchange, with two different, albeit related, sets of problematics:

The theory of money and trade responds to the question: how, in the movement of exchange, can prices characterize things—how can money establish a system of signs and designation between kinds of wealth? The theory of value responds to a question that intersects this first one, a question that probes, as it were vertically and in depth, the horizontal area in which exchange is continuously taking place: why are there things that men seek to exchange; why are some of them worth more than others, why do some of them, that have no utility, have high value, whereas some others, that are indispensable, have no value at all? 64

This leads to two simultaneously possible ways of analysing wealth: the one analysing value in the act of exchange itself, and the other placing value as a primary condition anterior to exchange, without which that exchange can not take place. Connecting this duality to the fundamental Classical quadrilateral, Foucault shows how the first of these two readings corresponds to the proposition, while the second corresponds to a reliance on primitive designations. This dichotomy also leads to the next division in Classical economics, that between the ‘psychological’ school of the ‘utilitarians’ and the Physiocrats. For Foucault,

The one analyses value in terms of the exchange of objects of need—of useful objects; the other in terms of the formation and origin of objects whose exchange will later determine their value—in terms of nature’s prolixity...it separates what is termed the ‘psychological theory’ of Condillac, Galiani, and Graslin, from that of the Physiocrats, with Quesnay and his school. 65

63 Ibid., 182-83.
64 Ibid., 189-90.
65 Ibid., 191.
Foucault begins his elaboration of these two schools that dominated Classical economic thought with the Physiocratic school of Quesnay, which rested its postulations on the nature of wealth on an anteriority, something like the designation of the grammarians:

The Physiocrats begin their analysis with the thing itself which is designated in value, but which exists prior to the system of wealth. The same is true of grammarians when they analyse words on the basis of their roots, or the immediate relation that unites a sound and a thing, and of the successive abstractions by means of which that root becomes a name in a language.66

According to the Physiocrats, an exchange is possible only when there is at one's disposal a superfluity that another party needs, constitution of value by means of trade, therefore, not being possible without a subtraction of goods. Values thus form the negative of goods, their creation being not a means of satisfying a greater number of needs, but the sacrifice of a certain quantity of goods in order to exchange others. Because of this negative and ever-debiting nature of value in all other trades, the Physiocrats lay the most stress on agriculture, which is the only sphere in which the increase in value due to production is not equivalent to the maintenance of the producer, because the real invisible producer (land) does not require any remuneration. The Physiocrats, therefore, accorded great importance to ground rent because it represents the net product—the quantity of goods provided by nature over and above the subsistence it yields to the worker and the remuneration it demands for itself in order to go on producing. Based on this primacy of land per se (and not agricultural labour), the Physiocrats' economic and political programme included, on the one hand, an increase in agricultural prices, the levying of all taxes on ground rent itself, and a vast reinvestment of money in the land for the advances necessary for future production, but not, on the other, an equivalent increase in the wages of those who till the land.

Moving next to the 'psychological' or the 'utilitarian' school, Foucault shows how its accordance of greater utility to the commodity after exchange is over, since otherwise the buyer would not have bought it and the seller would not have sold it, connects it to the grammatical theory of the proposition, where a sign gets utile only in syntactic use:

The analysis of Condillac, Galiani, Graslin, and Destutt corresponds to the grammatical theory of the proposition. It selects as its point of departure, not what is given in an exchange, but what is received: the same thing, in fact, but seen from the point of view of the person who needs it, who wants it, and who agrees to give up what he possesses in order to obtain this other thing which in his estimation is more useful and to which he attaches greater value.67

For the 'utilitarians', there are three possible ways in which this 'excess' value a commodity gains in exchange can be accounted for. It may either be, as Condillac puts it, that the 'surplus of each' of the exchangers corresponds in quality and in quantity to the needs of the other, and

66 Ibid., 195.
67 Ibid., 196.
so, utility and price correspond exactly, with no residuum. Or it may be that the surplus of one party is not sufficient for the needs of the other. In which case, the latter will not give all that he possesses, but keep some part of it in order to obtain from a third party the additional quantity indispensable to his need, this deducted portion giving rise to price. Or it may be, that there is nothing absolutely superfluous to either party, since each of them knows that he or she can use, sooner or later, the totality of the possession. In this case, the two parties may exchange only under the calculation that a portion of the other’s commodity would be more useful to him or her than an equivalent portion of his or her own. For the ‘utilitarians’, exchange, moreover, creates value in two ways. On the one hand, it increases values by giving rise to new utilities which satisfy needs. On the other, exchange also gives rise to an ‘appreciative’ value, where the comparison of each value with others, causes any new creation of utility to diminish the relative value of existing utilities. Thus it is exchange that constitutes the value of a commodity, giving each thing a price, while also lowering the price of every other thing in doing so.

It would apparently seem that the Physiocrats and the ‘utilitarians’ give two diametrically opposite notions of value. For the former, value lies anterior to exchange and exchange, in fact, causes a deduction in that value, while for the latter, value is determined posterior to exchange, and exchange always signifies an augmentation of value, at least in terms of utility. This would have provided a serious threat to the idea of a united Classical episteme, unless Foucault showed, in his usual way, how in both the interpretations the theory of value, like that of structure in natural history, links the moment of attribution (proposition) to that of articulation. Carrying the argument further, Foucault shows how the Physiocrats and the ‘utilitarians’ deal, basically, with the same epistemic categories of wealth and exchange, associable in the last instance to representation, and the inverse arrangement of the same that the two make is of secondary importance. For him, It will be seen that the theoretical elements are the same in the works of the Physiocrats and in those of their opponents. The body of fundamental propositions used is common to both: all wealth springs from the land; the value of things is linked with exchange; money has value as the representation of the wealth in circulation; circulation should be as simple and as complete as possible. But these theoretical segments are arranged by the Physiocrats and the ‘utilitarians’ in inverse orders; and as a result of the interplay of these differing arrangements, what plays a positive role in one theory becomes negative in the other.68

Having established the unified Classical episteme, in relation to its different characteristics, as observable in the triad of general grammar, natural history, and analysis of wealth, Foucault proceeds finally to give a ‘general table’ of the same, and show how the Classical epistemic model changed in the nineteenth century to give rise to another equally ordered episteme.

68 Ibid., 199.
f. The General Table and the Impending Change

Hereafter, Foucault gives the 'General Table' showing the configuration of the three Classical disciplines and their imports in terms of the fundamental quadrilateral of Attribution (Proposition), Articulation, Designation, and Derivation, and how this shows some basic changes in the nineteenth century to give rise to a new episteme.

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69 Ibid., 201.
According to the figure, utility of commodities or 'Objects of need' corresponds, as does the 'Visibility of beings' in natural history, to the attributive function which, for general grammar, is performed by the verb. When appreciative value becomes estimative value, that is, when the object of need takes part in exchanges, then each value finds itself patterned by the others, and value assumes the articulatory role recognized by general grammar in all the non-verbal elements of the proposition, just as when visible signs of living beings give rise to their description, a variated articulation might be said to have occurred. Between Attribution and Articulation, every commodity gains its Value, just as in natural history the rendering of the descriptive from the merely visible gives rise to Structure. As the figure further shows, the theory of 'Monetary pledge' corresponds to the function of Designation, or the finding of primitive nominal roots in general grammar, as does the 'Designation of species' in natural history. On the other hand, corresponding to tropes and shifts of meaning, or the function of Derivation, one has circulation and trade in the analysis of wealth, and the adjacency of beings in natural history. Between Designation and Derivation, between the monetary pledge and the circulation of commodities through trade, is formed the price of a commodity, just as character is formed in natural history between the different species and their adjacencies. For general grammar, on the other hand, between Attribution and Articulation, there is projected the idea of a universal language—the Ars combinatoria, just as between Designation and Derivation there arises the possibility of an Encyclopaedia where all nominal forms may have an explanation of their roots and changes. All this has two major implications: first, that the Classical episteme is a regular one where there is a one-to-one correspondence between elements of its triad; and second, that in it language plays a pivotal privileged role:

In this sense, it can be said that, for Classical thought, systems of natural history and theories of money or trade have the same conditions of possibility as language itself. This means two things: first, that order in nature and order in the domain of wealth have the same mode of being, for the Classical experience, as the order of representations as manifested by words; second, that words form a system of signs sufficiently privileged, when it is a question of revealing the order of things, for natural history—if it is well organized—and money—if it is well regulated—to function in the same way as language.70

It should be noted, however, that the other two sides of the quadrilateral remain open. Since Designation cannot make possible an Articulation of nature, wealth, and representations, and the systematic rule of the Proposition cannot account for the endless changeability in Derivation, between the two, it becomes necessary to suppose that representations simply resemble one another, that natural beings are in relations of perfect adjacency and resemblance, and that human needs are capable of perfect mutual satisfaction—in short, to construct a mythical continuity and perfect representability between things. The

70 Ibid., 203.
shift that occurred in the Western *episteme* towards the end of the eighteenth century, as the other quadrilateral in the figure would show, was that scientifically strong positivities emerged in just that area where the Classical *episteme* was metaphysically strong, while a philosophical space emerged in the area where Classicism had established its firm epistemological grip. Philology, biology, and political economy arise in the plane between Articulation and Designation on the one hand and Attribution and Derivation on the other, because these new sciences are intended to probe the relations between the unitary and the multiple, something that was never there in the Classical age. Inversely, the two great forms of modern philosophic reflection were to emerge in the place where the objects of Classical knowledge dissolved, that between Attribution and Articulation giving rise to a questioning of the relations between a formal apophantics and a formal ontology in the form of a renewed formalization; and that between primitive Designation and Derivation questioning the relations between original meaning and history through interpretation. For Foucault,

Philology, biology, and political economy were established, not in the places formerly occupied by *general grammar*, *natural history*, and the *analysis of wealth*, but in an area where those forms of knowledge did not exist, in the space they left blank, in the deep gaps that separated their broad theoretical segments and that were filled with the murmur of the ontological continuum. The object of knowledge in the nineteenth century is formed in the very place where the Classical plenitude has fallen silent.71

The final point to be noted is that Classical thought accorded a central position, in its table, to *name* and its relation to *order*, how to a Nomenclature could become a Taxonomy, but modern thought has no such privileged category. Instead what occupies the most fundamental position in modern thought is a question that cuts through the quadrilateral down the Philosophical field: a question about the relation between meaning and form—a question that presupposes the most typical 'modern' method of Structuralism.

g. *Sade and Desire: the Limits of Representation*

Though, on the surface, the analyses of language, natural orders, and wealth appear perfectly coherent and homogeneous, it is easy to understand that this order represents a very unstable equilibrium, all of it being based on a single problematic category of representation. Within the Classical *episteme*, language is simply the representation of words, nature the representation of beings, and wealth the representation of needs. Therefore, a decline in the status of representation can in itself mark the end of Classical thought. This decline was brought about, towards the end of the eighteenth century, by a sudden enormous thrust of freedom and desire—so characteristic of an age which saw the French Revolution, the American war of independence and the Romantic movement—which led to the emancipation of language, the living being, and need from the rigid demands of representation. It is a

primacy of desire that, therefore, caused the 'modern' episteme to be ushered in, and one can hardly doubt the role of the great contemporary guru of desire, Marquis de Sade, in it.

For Foucault, the epistemic reversal, mentioned above, is symbolized in Sade's *Justine* and *Juliette* much in the same way as *Don Quixote* symbolizes the threshold between Renaissance and Classical thought. *Justine* corresponds to the second part of *Don Quixote*; the protagonist in this novel is the unattainable object of the desire of which she is the subject too, just as Don Quixote is both the object and the subject of representations around him. Juliette, on the other hand, is just the subject of desires; but that those desires are carried over, by Sade, into discourse and transformed into scenes, marks a surrender of the discursive space by representation to the new forces of desire. For Foucault,

Sade attains the end of Classical discourse and thought. He holds sway precisely upon their frontier. After him, violence, life and death, desire, and sexuality will extend, below the level of representation, an immense expanse of shade which we are now attempting to recover, as far as we can, in our discourse, in our freedom, in our thought. 72

Thus, it is with Sade, that the Classical episteme reaches its limits and the modern one begins, where 'human' love and fear, blood and sweat would replace the craftily constructed Classical world of ordered representations, and I can proceed to see how Foucault discusses the triad of discursive formations in this age.

IV. Historicity and Interiority: The Order of Things in the Modern Age

a. Analogy and Succession and the two steps to Modernity

The Classical order used the principle of non-quantitative identities and differences to separate and unite things and form representational tables out of human discourse, natural beings, and the exchange of wealth. It has already been seen at the end of the last section, how the end of the eighteenth century brings into play, within the order of things, a complex net of human desire and real time, so that from the nineteenth century, History takes over from order as the organizing principle. This principle of History deployed, in a temporal series of succession, the analogies that connect distinct structures in the analysis of production, organically structured beings, and linguistic groups. Thus, with the replacement of Order by History as the governing principle, the Classical operating categories of identities and differences are also replaced by those of analogies and successions. The modern episteme would thus try to connect the temporal order, the history, of every event to the origin, the great chain of History, just like Classical thought linked the empirical order visible in entities to the grand principle of Order that runs all through the world. Foucault says,

72 *Ibid.*, 211.
Classical order, too, could be established as a framework for acquired knowledge, but it was more fundamentally the space in which every being approached man’s consciousness; And the Classical metaphysic resided precisely in that gap between order and Order, between classifications and Identity, between natural beings and Nature; in short, between men’s perception (or imagination) and the understanding and will of God. In the nineteenth century, philosophy was to reside in the gap between history and History, between events and the Origin, between evolution and the first rending open of the source, between oblivion and the Return.  

It is this epistemological configuration, governed by a historicity and the working diad of analogies and successions that converts the triad of discursive forms into political economy investigating the history of labour, biology examining the evolutionary history of organisms, and philology dealing with the history of languages. According a precise chronological location to this epistemological shift becomes, however, a problem and one can only point, as Foucault does, the outer limits of the shift in the years 1775 and 1825. Foucault shows how, instead of a united chronologically locatable event, one can perceive in each of the domains two successive phases, which together cause the shift to happen in progressive stages of change. In the first of these phases, the fundamental mode of ordering things in the Classical age does not change, but some methodical changes introduce key concepts like labour, organic structure, and word inflection, into the Classical triad, to provide the foundation stone for modern economics, biology, and philology. It is, however, only in the second phase that words, classes, and wealth acquire a mode of being no longer compatible with that of representation, and form a totally new epistemic configuration, that is called ‘modernity’. Modernity was thus achieved in the Western world through two successive steps, and I now discuss what Foucault says about the first of these two phases.

b. The First Step to Economics, Biology, and Philology

The first step in the domain of materiality comes with Adam Smith, who paved the way for modern political economy by introducing the concept of labour into the domain of analysis of wealth. Adam Smith relates the notion of wealth to that of labour by relating the ‘value in use’ of things to men’s needs, and their ‘value in exchange’ to the quantity of labour applied in its production. Adam Smith did not, however, invent labour as an economic concept, since it can be found in Quesnay and Condillac; nor does he give it a new role to play, since he too uses it as a measure of exchange value. But he displaces labour by using it for an analysis that no longer simply expresses exchange in terms of need, but according to the units of labour that have in reality produced it. Thus, in spite of operating within the Classical paradigm of wealth, Adam Smith represents a major hiatus with it by foregrounding labour as the category of analysis. Foucault says.

73 Ibid., 219.
In relation to that of his predecessors, Adam Smith's analysis represents an essential hiatus: it distinguishes between the reason for exchange and the measurement of that which is exchangeable, between the nature of what is exchanged and the units that enable it to be broken down. People exchange because they have needs, and they exchange precisely the objects that they need; but the order of exchanges, their hierarchy and the differences expressed in that hierarchy, are established by the units of labour that have been invested in the objects in question... This hiatus is of great importance. It is true that Adam Smith is still, like his predecessors, analysing the field of positivity that the eighteenth century termed 'wealth'; and by that term he too means objects of need—and thus the objects of a certain form of representation—representing themselves in the movements and methods of exchange. But within this duplication, and in order to regulate its laws—the units and measures of exchange—he formulates a principle of order that is irreducible to the analysis of representation: he unearths labour, that is, toil and time, the working-day that at once patterns and uses up man's life.\footnote{Ibid., 224-25.}

This focus on labour makes it imperative for the study of money to finally go beyond the domain of representation, because the fecundity of labour can only be based upon conditions like industrial progress, growing division of tasks, accumulation of capital, and division of productive and non-productive labour, that are exterior to representation. Thus it is with Adam Smith, that reflection upon wealth moves towards modern political economy in two ways: on the one hand, it points in the direction of an anthropology (because a focus on labour entails a focus on the human worker), thereby corresponding to the humanistic shift in the modern episteme already discussed in the context of the role of desire in it; on the other, it heralds the possibility of a political economy whose object would no longer be the exchange of wealth, but its real production in terms of forms of labour and capital.

The domain of natural history shows similar modifications between the years 1775 and 1795. Though the general principles of taxinomia are not challenged by the likes of A-L. de Jussieu, Vicq d'Azyr, and Lamarck, they question the technique of establishing character, by replacing the external principle of visible structure with the internal principle of organic structure. This category of organic structure appears in four different ways. First, in the form of a hierarchy of characters, or that certain characters are more important than the others, because of their more essential functions. This hierarchy, therefore, shifts the locus of character from the visible structure to internal organic functions, and this provides the second step to the formation of organic structure. At a third level, this emphasis on a hidden organic cause behind the visible superficial organs brings in the notion of life into the ordering of natural beings, paving the way for a life sciences or biology. Finally, this focus on internal organs and life dissolve the parallelism between classification and nomenclature including in the erstwhile horizontal plane of classifications a vertical third dimension of the organic structure. Summing up, Foucault says,
The concept of organic structure already existed in eighteenth century natural history—just as, in the sphere of analysis of wealth, the notion of labour was not invented at the end of the Classical age; but it was a concept that served at that time to define a certain mode of composition of complex individuals, on the basis of more elementary materials... It is through the works of Jussieu, Vicq d’Azyr, and Lamarck that it begins to function for the first time as a method of characterization: it subordinates characters one to another; it links them to functions; it arranges them in accordance with an architecture that is internal as well as external, and no less invisible than visible; it distributes them throughout a space that is other than that of names, discourse, and language. 75

The foregrounding of organic structure entails, at a deeper level, a deep dividing line between the organic and inorganic, which Pallas and Lamarck formulate as the opposition between the living and the non-living. Thus, it is through this first step of the organic structure, that biology, which bases itself on the basic opposition of life and death, eventually emerged.

The area of language analysis shows an exact counterpart of these events. In general grammar, every word is relatable to an initial designation. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, however, there is no attempt any longer to identify each language in terms of its ancestral memory, but only in terms of the extent to which languages resemble one another through a form intermediary between articulation and the designation: namely, inflection. While grammarians had long been familiar with inflection (just as the concept of labour was known before Adam Smith, or the concept of organic structure was there before Lamarck), they analysed inflections only for their representative value. On the other hand, when Coeurdoux and William Jones compare the different forms of the verb ‘to be’ in Sanskrit, Latin, and Greek, one discovers an impending end to the rule of representation.

Until the end of the eighteenth century, this new analysis has its place in the search for the representative values of language. It is still a question of discourse. But already, through the inflectional system, the dimension of the purely grammatical is appearing: language no longer consists only of representations and of sounds that in turn represent the representations and are ordered among them as the links of thought require; it consists also of formal elements, grouped into a system, which impose upon the sounds, syllables, and roots an organization that is not that of representation. Thus an element has been introduced into the analysis of language that is not reducible to it (as labour was introduced into the analysis of exchange, or organic structure into that of characters). 76

When languages were defined as discourse, they had no other history than that of their representations. But the end of the eighteenth century, sees inflection emerge, which determines their resemblances to others in the course of history, paving the way for philology.

Towards the last years of the eighteenth century, therefore, general grammar, natural history, and analysis of wealth witnessed a similar epistemological event. After this event, what gives value to commodities is not just the representation of other objects of desire, but

75 Ibid., 231.
76 Ibid., 235.
the element of *labour* that cannot be reduced to representation. Similarly, what makes it possible to characterize a natural being is no longer its representative visible elements, but *organic structure*, a non-representative relation within the being. And finally, what defines a language is not how it represents representations, but its *inflectional system*, which is an internal manner of modifying words. While this event, thus, points towards a non-representational interiorized system of thought in all three discursive domains of the modern *episteme*, it should be remembered that the inceptors of this event were not modernists, but proponents of Classical thought. Thinkers like Smith, Lamarck, and Jones, thus, embody a fundamental duality, which gets reflected in the contemporary philosophical duality between the *Ideology* of Destutt de Tracy and the *Critical thought* of Kant. Foucault says,

> It must not be forgotten that, though Smith, Jussieu, and W. Jones made use of the notions of labour, organic structure, and grammatical system, their aim in doing so was not to break out of the tabular space laid out by Classical thought, or to find a way around the visibility of things and to escape from the play of the representation representing itself; it was simply to establish within it a form of connection that would be at the same time analysable, constant, and well founded. It was still a matter of discovering the general order of identities and differences... And there is no doubt that there exists, corresponding to this ambiguous epistemological configuration, a philosophical duality which indicates its imminent dissolution.\(^77\)

It is this duality that, therefore, finally dissolves the Classical *episteme*, and brings in modernity, and in the next section, I show how Foucault describes this dissolution.

### c. Modernity in the Duality of Ideology and Criticism

Just as, in the first step towards the formation of modernity, thinkers showed both traces of allegiance to representation and signs of resistance to it, philosophy at the end of the eighteenth century shows the coexistence of Ideology and Critical philosophy, the former taking representation as its underlying principle and the latter questioning it. Ideologues, like Destutt de Tracy and Gerando, do not question the foundation or the limits of representation, and scan the relation of representations to each other. Kant, on the other hand, does not seek this relation and tries to find, in a critical way, what is at the basis of all representation. It is the Kantian critique, therefore, that, through a questioning of representation, constitutes the threshold of modernity. But, it should be noted that in its rejection of the metaphysics of representation, Criticism introduces into thought a new metaphysics of origins. For Foucault,

> In this sense, Criticism brings out the metaphysical dimension that eighteenth-century philosophy had attempted to reduce solely by means of the analysis of representation. But it opens up at the same the possibility of another metaphysics; one whose purpose will be to question, apart from representation, all that is the source and origin of representation; it makes possible those philosophies of Life, of the Will, and of the Word, that the nineteenth century is to deploy in the wake of criticism.\(^78\)

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\(^77\) *Ibid.*, 240.

This reliance on metaphysics on the part of both the contesting philosophies marks, interestingly, an end to the rule of representation, because metaphysics can appear in such a big way only when mathesis loosens its grip on the ordering of things, and if mathesis is dissolved, Classical order gets bound to the same doom. Since both Ideology and Critical thought base themselves on metaphysics, both lead to the formation of transcendentals. While the Ideological analysis of the conditions of a relation between representations from the point of view of what makes them possible foregrounds the analysis of the transcendental subject, the Critical questioning of conditions of a relation between representations from the point of view of the being itself leads to the transcendental object. Since positivities of labour, life, and language are based on a priori conditions of knowledge, they correspond to Kant's theory of the transcendental field, but since they also concern a posteriori syntheses of objects of knowledge, they give rise, on the other hand, to a 'positivism'. Thus, the philosophical duality gets transformed into a triangle of Criticism, positivism and metaphysics in the modern episteme, and Foucault says, 'The criticism-positivism-metaphysics triangle of the object was constitutive of European thought from the beginning of the nineteenth century to Bergson.'

Because of this distinction between the a priori and the a posteriori, a new division arises, at the end of the eighteenth century, between the analytic disciplines and those that make use of synthesis. The result is that modernity gives birth to a field of a priori sciences, like the pure formal deductive sciences based on logic and mathematics, and also a domain of a posteriori sciences, like the empirical sciences of economics, biology, and philology. Thus, while during the Classical age, empirical knowledge and the pure sciences were joined by a universal mathesis into a unified corpus of learning, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the two separate with a corresponding fracture in the unity of mathesis. This fracture takes place along two lines: along that which divides pure forms of analysis from the laws of synthesis, and along that which separates transcendental subjectivity and the mode of being of objects, and this gives rise to the two main philosophical trends of the nineteenth century—that of Fichte and that of Hegel. The formalist philosophy of Fichte tries either to reduce all transcendental reflection to the analysis of formalisms, or to discover, in transcendental subjectivity, a synthetic basis for the possibility of all formalism. Hegelian phenomenology, on the other hand, takes the whole of the objective empirical domain into the interior of a subjective consciousness, thus making available, simultaneously, an empirical as well as a transcendental field. This is how the philosophical duality between Ideology and Criticism gives rise, through an intermediate involvement of metaphysics and positivism, to formalism and phenomenology, which comprise the very backbone of modern thought.

79 Ibid., 245.
Summing up this formation of the 'first step' towards modernity, Foucault shows, once again, how the introduction in it of some concepts, albeit within the ambit of representation, led finally to the second phase of total consolidation of modernity:

In a first phase—which extends chronologically from 1775 to 1795, and whose configurations we can indicate by the works of Smith, Jussieu, and Wilkins—the concepts of labour, organism, and grammatical system had been introduced—or reintroduced with particular status—into the analysis of representations and into the tabulated space in which that analysis had hitherto been deployed... Then—and this is the second phase of the event—knowledge in its positivity changes its nature and its form.80

What changed in this second phase was the mode of knowledge itself. In the domain of materiality, exchange was replaced as the most fundamental figure by production, bringing into view new knowable objects like capital and new methods like the analysis of forms of production. Similarly, in the domain of physicality, study of the internal organic structure involving methods of comparative anatomy came into being because life, as a fundamental form of knowledge, also produced new objects like the relation of character to function and new methods like the search for analogies. And finally, in the domain of mentality, discourse as a mode of language was replaced by language itself, with new objects like families of languages whose grammatical systems are analogous and new methods like the analysis of rules governing the modifications of consonants and vowels emerging. Thus the second phase finally gives birth to the modern positivities of political economy, biology, and philology, and now I would discuss, one after the other, these formations and how they compose the nineteenth century episteme—Foucault's 'modern' order of things.

d. Political Economy: the Modern Order of Materials

While Adam Smith, gave labour a new status in economic analyses, he still accorded precedence to representation, so that all merchandise represented a certain labour, and all labour could represent a certain quantity of merchandise. It was left to Ricardo to give labour, finally, a non-representative role, as a real worker's energy and time that can be bought and sold, and make it the origin of all value. For Foucault,

Value can no longer be defined, as in the Classical age, on the basis of a total system of equivalences, and of the capacities that commodities have of representing one another. Value has ceased to be a sign, it has become a product. If things are worth as much as the labour devoted to them, or if their value is at least proportionate to that labour, it is not that labour is a fixed and constant value exchangeable as such in all places and all times, it is because any value, whatever it may be, has its origin in labour. And the best proof of this is that the value of things increases with the quantity of labour that must be devoted to them if we wish to produce them; but it does not change for the increase or decrease of the wages for which, labour, like all other commodities, is exchanged.81

80 Ibid., 250-52.
81 Ibid., 254.
This conversion of labour into a commodity has three major consequences, and Foucault discusses these next.

The first consequence is the establishing of a causal series that organizes labour. Value is determined by the quantity of labour necessary for the manufacture of a thing, which depends upon the forms of production, which, in turn, depend on the degree of division of labour, the quantity and nature of tools used, and the mass of capital the entrepreneur has at his disposal. Thus, one finds a great linear homogeneous series of successive productions, which introduces the notion of a continuous historical time. The second consequence is concerned with the notion of scarcity, where the Classical belief in land making it possible to overcome scarcity is inverted by Ricardo in the analysis that the apparent generosity of land is due to its growing avarice, or that the constant pressure on humanity to find newer resources from land drives it towards its extinction. Thus, economics becomes anthropological, and designates in the hardship of human labour the only means of postponing the certainty of death. The last consequence is that as, because of the 'avarice' of land, one is continuously forced to cultivate less fertile tracts of land, there arises a discrepancy between the cost of labour and price of the commodity for more fertile land, because the less fertile tracts needing more labour would set the standard price of a commodity. This leads to an increased profit for the easily cultivable lands, but as the nominal wage of the labourers also begin to rise, in order to cover the minimum costs of their subsistence, the profit of the entrepreneurs decrease indefinitely, until it disappears altogether. Ricardian economics thus introduces, in one and the same movement, the human being and his or her death, the chain of History and its dissolution, the essence as well as the finitude of being and time.

Foucault notices the apparent paradox that the historicity introduced into the study of materiality by Ricardo also marks its end, and says,

Paradoxically, it is the historicity introduced into economics by Ricardo that makes it possible to conceive of this immobilization of History. Classical thought, of course, conceived of this economy as possessing an ever open, ever-changing future... On the other hand, it is the cumulative time of population and production, the uninterrupted history of scarcity, that makes it possible from the nineteenth century to conceive of the impoverishment of History, its progressive inertia, its petrification, and, ultimately, its stony immobility.82

This end of time can be achieved in two different ways: either the world of things can move gradually towards a final state of stability that justifies the teleological movement; or it may attain a point of reversal at which it becomes fixed, thereby signalling the end of time. These two solutions refer to the two major politico-economic models of modernity—the first corresponding to Ricardo's 'pessimism', and the second to the Marxian path. In the Ricardian

82 Ibid., 259.
model, the promise of History functions as a compensating mechanism for the anthropological determination of finitude. According to it, as scarcity becomes more intense, labour and production increase, as do corollarily the cost of production, leading finally to a time when labour can no longer be supported by the commodity it produces. It is at this terminal point of history that, Ricardo believes, scarcity will limit itself by a process of demographic stabilization, and labour will adjust itself exactly to its needs by a distribution of wealth. The other model of Marx constructs the relation of History to anthropological finitude in the opposite direction, with History playing a negative, rather than a compensatory, role.

For Marx, it is History that increases the pressures of need and makes individuals work and produce more, while receiving, at most, what is indispensable for their subsistence. Thus, with time, the product of labour accumulates, in the form of surplus labour, which is alienated from those who accomplish that labour, and provides capital with the possibility of buying more labour. In this way, the number of people maintained by History at the limit of their conditions of existence grows on, until there comes a saturation point, when the constant pressure on wages and the excess of production cause the labour market to shrink, lowering wages and increasing unemployment. It is at this point that a class of men, thrown by poverty to the very brink of death, experience the truth of need, hunger, and labour, and restore this truth through a revolutionary reversal of the tide of time.

Thus, for Foucault, Marx belongs very much to the same episteme as a 'bourgeois' economist like Ricardo, and the same conditions of possibility give rise to Marxist thought and capitalist economic theory. Foucault explains this in his usual provocative style in one of his most quoted passages:

At the deepest level of Western knowledge, Marxism introduced no real discontinuity; it found its place without difficulty, as a full, quiet, comfortable, and, goodness knows, satisfying form for a time (its own), within an epistemological arrangement that welcomed it gladly (since it was this arrangement that was in fact making room for it) and that it, in return, had no intention of disturbing and, above all, no power to modify, even one jot, since it rested entirely upon it. Marxism exists in nineteenth century thought like fish in water: that it is unable to breathe anywhere else. Though it is in opposition to the 'bourgeois' theories of economics, and though this opposition leads it to use the project of a radical reversal of History as a weapon against them, that conflict and that project have nevertheless as their condition of possibility, not the reworking of all History, but an event that any archaeology can situate with precision, and that prescribed simultaneously, and according to the same mode, both nineteenth-century bourgeois economics and nineteenth-century revolutionary economics. Their controversies may have stirred up a few waves and caused a few surface ripples: but they are no more than storms in a children's paddling pool.83

For Foucault, the nineteenth century epistemological configuration continued unhindered for a long time until Nietzsche reversed its most revered categories at the end of the nineteenth century. Nietzsche took up the modernist concept of the end of time and transformed it into

83 Ibid., 261-62.
the death of God and the story of the last man; he took up anthropological finitude and made it the basis for the formation of the superman; he took up also the notion of a continuous chain of History, but converted it into the infinity of the eternal return. It is with Nietzsche, therefore, that, for Foucault, contemporary thought had its possibility in a space where both dialectic and liberal humanism had been debunked in their futility.

It is in vain that the death of God, the imminence of the superman, and the promise and terror of the great year take up once more, as it were term by term, the elements that are arranged in nineteenth-century thought and form its archaeological framework. The fact remains that they sent all these stable forms up in flames, that they used their charred remains to draw strange and perhaps impossible faces; and by a light that may be either—we do not yet know which—the reviving flame of the last great fire or an indication of the dawn, we see the emergence of what may perhaps be the space of contemporary thought. It was Nietzsche, in any case, who burned for us, even before we were born, the intermingle promises of the dialectic and anthropology.

The earlier chapter saw how Foucault cultivates, among others, Nietzsche as an alternative to the terror of Reason, and here one can see how Foucault credits Nietzsche, and not Marx, with having caused any remarkable discontinuity in the dominant nineteenth century stream of thought. With Foucault having credited the possible inception of his own episteme to Nietzsche, it is likely that his thought would be deeply influenced by the former, and this is what I will take up in a subsequent chapter.

e. Biology: the Modern Order of Life

As has been stated earlier, Jussieu and his likes, with their organic structure, had taken the first step towards biology, just as Smith’s use of the constant value of labour was the first step towards economics. After this, in the second phase, just as Ricardo freed labour from its role as a measure and introduced it, prior to any exchange, into the general forms of production, Cuvier freed the organic structure from its taxonomic function and introduced it, prior to any classification, into the functional organization of living beings. For Foucault, the organizing principle behind biology was Cuvier’s foregrounding of function over structure:

In Classical analysis, the organ was defined by both its structure and its function... it is this arrangement that Cuvier overthrows: doing away with the postulates of both their coincidence and their independence, he gives function prominence over the organ—and to a large extent—and subjects the arrangement of the organ to the sovereignty of function.

This privileging of function gives rise to three new relations in the new science of living beings of the age. The first of the three is coexistence, or that an organ or a system of organs cannot be present in a living being unless another organ or another system of organs is also present to support and aid its function. The second relation is that in spite of there being coexistence of different organs, there is an internal hierarchy of levels, so that organs are

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84 Ibid., 263.
85 Ibid., 264.
arranged in a structure in the form of a hierarchical pyramid in terms of their functional importance. The third relation is of dependence, or that, in spite of this pre-eminence of one function over the other, all the organs are dependent on each other and work in tandem according to a certain organic structural plan.

These three relations present a total reversal of Classical taxonomy, which was constructed entirely upon the basis of the four simultaneously representable variables of forms, number, arrangement, and magnitude. After Cuvier, life in its non-representable functional aspect provides the sole basis for any possibility of classification. The classification of living beings in modern biology is thus based not on visible external characters, but on those elements most hidden from view. Instead of the unitary ordered field of Classical taxonomy, one has, in the nineteenth century, two series of oppositions. The first is that between the secondary organs, which are visible on the surface of the body, and the primary organs, which are hidden and unreachable except by dissection. The second opposition is that between the organs in general and the functions, which are not perceptible, but determinant of perceptible organic structure. The pair of oppositions leads to two correlated techniques in modern biology, that of comparative anatomy on the one hand, and a specific anatomy intended at establishing indicative relations between superficial and concealed organs of the body.

Cuvier's analyses also re-align the organization of continuities and discontinuities in nature, with comparative anatomy making it possible to establish two distinct forms of continuity in the living world. The first continuity is that of essential functions, like respiration, digestion, circulation, reproduction, and locomotion, found in most of the species. The second continuity is of the organs in terms of their greater or lesser perfection. Between these two continuities, one finds the distribution of discontinuous masses, which obey varied structural plans because of the same functions being ordered in varying hierarchies, and carried out by organs of various types. This notion of the discontinuous within conceived modes of continuity ushers in the category of life to modern biological thought. For Foucault, Classical being was without flaw; life, on the other hand, is without edges or shading. Being was spread out over an immense table; life isolates forms that are bound in upon themselves. Being was posited in the perpetually analysable space of representation; life withdraws into the enigma of a force inaccessible in its essence, apprehendable only in the efforts it makes here and there to manifest and maintain itself.86

The category of life appears simply because the continuous maintenance of living conditions within all discontinuities can only be explained by the postulate that a living being, in spite of all its discontinuity, finds itself subjected to a continuous relation with everything that

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86 Ibid., 273.
surrounds it. It is this relation that, from the nineteenth century gets known as life. Life, as a conditional category, thus, links the internal organic structure of an organism with the external world of true events.

This is how historicity gets introduced into the domain of living beings as a fundamental relation between the organism and the world around it, and though one does not have in Cuvier's time a history of living beings, as was later described by evolutionism, one does have a study of life in terms of the conditions that enable it to have a history. This is also the case with Ricardo, who accorded wealth the status of historicity without formulating it as economic history. Thus, Cuvier's fixism, like Ricardo's pessimism, can arise only against a historical background. The greatest consequence that this constitution of a living historicity had on European biological thought is the change in focus, in terms of objects of study, from plants (which were the usually studied forms in the Classical age) to animals, because the animal, in its mobility, represents much more the force of life. Summing up, therefore, with how the modern order of things in the domain of physicality revolves around the distinction between life and death, and how, in the final analysis, the singularly important contribution of modern biology to modes of European thought is this notion of 'life', Foucault concludes his discussion on the nineteenth century mode of study of living forms by saying,

Life is the root of all existence, and the non-living, nature in its inert form is merely spent life; mere being is the non-being of life. For life—and this is why it has a radical value in nineteenth-century thought—is at the same time the nucleus of being and of non-being... The experience of life is thus posited as the most general law of beings, the revelation of that primitive force on the basis of which they are; it functions as an untamed ontology, one trying to express the indissociable being and non-being of all beings. 87

f. Philology: the Modern Order of Words

In the domain of language, a similar transformation is noticed around the same period. Though it is not that the word ceases to represent meaning from this period, the locus of this representation is shifted from some innate discursivity of the word to the grammatical functions it performs, and to the modifications it undergoes in the course of time. To have any meaning in the modern episteme, therefore, a word must belong to a grammatical totality, which, for Foucault, was schematized through four theoretical segments proposed by the likes of Schlegel, Grimm, and Bopp:

How was this philological positivity formed? There are four theoretical segments that provide us with indications of its constitution early in the nineteenth century—at the time of Schlegel's essay on the language and philosophy of the Indians (1808), Grimm's Deutsche Grammatik (1818), and Bopp's book on conjugation systems of Sanskrit (1816). 88

87 Ibid., 278.
88 Ibid., 282.
The first segment concerns the manner in which a language can undergo an *internal analysis* and be distinguished from other languages. The Classical period defined the individuality of a language on the basis of criteria like the proportion of different sounds in its words, the precedence it gives to certain categories of words, the manner of representing relations, and the preferred order of words. After Schlegel, however, the only way to do so was to study its mode of combination of grammatical elements, and this mode could be any one of two broad types. The first is of juxtaposing elements in such a way that they determine one another, with various combinations possible and each of the units preserving its autonomy, as is the case with Chinese. The second mode is the inflectional system, which modifies the root forms of the language in predetermined ways from within, as is the case with Sanskrit.

The second theoretical segment studies *internal variations* of a language as embodied in its phonetics. This primacy of sound in linguistic analysis stems from the fact that in the age, on the one hand, linguists like Rask, Grimm, and Bopp, treated language as a totality of phonetic elements, while on the other, scholars like Raynouard and the brothers Grimm were taking more and more interest in non-written literature, folk tales and spoken dialects. In any case, the analysis in this segment was made in three directions: the typology of various sounds employed in a language, the conditions that determine a sound change, and the invariability of these transformations throughout history. It can thus be noted how this segment points in two directions—the humanness of spoken forms, and history—two categories which have already been seen to emerge in economics and biology.

The third segment is the emergence of a new theory of the *root*, which becomes possible because of this new science of phonetic modifications. The Classical method of determining roots, through alphabetical constants and significative constants, is replaced in the nineteenth century by purely linguistic means. Etymology, thus, ceases to be an endless regression towards a primitive language, and becomes, instead, a limited method of analysis. This dissociation of the history of a language from a mythical 'origin' has two consequences. First, shorn of the grave responsibility of connecting itself in action continuously to a representational past, language becomes, in the nineteenth century, much more expressive. Secondly, this taking away from language the onus to own an origin turns language studies from a concern for civilizational imperatives to those of human will and desire.

The fourth segment concerns a new definition of systems of *kinship* between languages arising from this new principle of analysis of roots. While general grammar, because of its ahistorical belief in stability of languages, excluded any comparison between
them, after Grimm and Bopp this becomes the established mode, thus rooting philology firmly on the ground of modern European thought. What is to be noted is that this new grammar is purely diachronic, and realizable only within history. And Foucault notes that this is why Saussure could escape from this diachronic vocation of philology, and establish his synchronic structural linguistics, only by rejecting the premises of modern theories of language in favour of 'semiology', which roots itself in representation.

Having described the four theoretical segments of philological thought, Foucault shows next how these four contrast to the four elements of the Classical quadrilateral of language. The theory of *kinship* between languages is in contrast to the theory of *derivation*, which presupposed constant external factors behind language change. The theory of the *root* contrasts with that of *designation*, because the former is the result of a linguistic individuality, while the latter points towards a mythical primitive origin. The study of the *internal variations* of language is opposed to the theory of *articulation*, because, as opposed to the latter's insistence on transformations through signification, the former believes in phonetic variations. Finally, the *internal analysis* of language is the very opposite of proposition, which relies for the whole of language on the exterior act of affirmation in representation.

Thus, having opposed itself, term by term, to the foundational categories of general grammar, nineteenth century philology brings the Classical representational order in language to an end, thereby also bringing to an end the obvious privileged status of language and its certain relation to all knowledge. Foucault says,

> The Classical order of language has now drawn to a close. It has lost its transparency and its major function in the domain of knowledge... [In the Classical age] language was a form of knowing and knowing was automatically discourse. Thus, language occupied a fundamental situation in relation to all knowledge: it was only by the medium of language that the things of the world could be known... From the nineteenth century, language began to fold in upon itself, to acquire its own particular density, to deploy a history, an objectivity, and laws of its own. It became one object of knowledge among others, on the same level as living beings, wealth and value, and the history of events and men... To know language is no longer to come as close as possible to knowledge itself; it is merely to apply the methods of understanding in general to a particular domain of objectivity.\(^9\)

This demotion of language from the status of the singular means to all knowledge to that of a mere object is compensated for in three ways. The first compensation is that, in spite of the fact that language in itself cannot lead one to knowledge any more, it is still the only medium to express any knowledge in discourse. This has two consequences: the first being to neutralize scientific language and make it as close as possible to the science itself through a surfeit of technical terms, as is evident through positivism; and, the second being the search

for a logic independent of grammars and vocabularies, as is visible in the symbolic logic of
Boolean algebra. The second compensation is a renewed critical value bestowed upon the
study of language, so that language becomes the locus of all explanations and expositions,
and much of modern discourse becomes an extended exegesis of words. For Foucault,

This is how we must understand the revival, so marked in the nineteenth century, of
all the techniques of exegesis. This reappearance is due to the fact that language has
resumed the enigmatic density it possessed at the time of the Renaissance...The first
book of Das Kapital is an exegesis of 'value'; all Nietzsche is an exegesis of a few
Greek words; Freud, the exegesis of all those unspoken phrases that support and at the
same time undermine our apparent discourse, our fantasies, our dreams, our bodies. 90

This premium on linguistic exegesis explains, for Foucault, the apparently paradoxical
progress of nineteenth century thought in the two opposite directions of formalism as well as
the unconscious, towards Russell as well as Freud, just as it also explains the coexistence, in
the twentieth century, of both structuralism and phenomenology. Finally, the third
compensation, which, for Foucault, is also the most important, is the appearance of 'literature'
as a discipline and as having its own peculiar linguistic forms. Foucault argues that though
literature had existed from the earliest days of human civilization, it was only in the
nineteenth century that it appeared as a separate positivity, and it was only within the modern
episteme that it came to have its special status as contra-language, as an alternative to the
dominant linguistic discourse of philology.

Having reached the end of the current discussion on what forms discourses in the
domains of mentality, materiality and physicality, exemplified by those of language, money,
and living beings, respectively, take in the nineteenth century, there is one point that really
stands out beyond all the other obvious grounds of commonality between the positivities.
Modern economic thought turns ceaselessly to labour, making the human labourer the subject
of its discourse, and his or her toil and suffering the very centre of the monetary act. Modern
biological thought, in its carefully constructed division between life and death, turns
invariably to the body, the actual living being, his or her visceral organs, and his or her
organic bodily functions. Modern linguistic thought, similarly, turns, beyond the autonomy of
words, to the actual speaking being, the sounds he or she produces, the will he or she posits in
speech, the historical changes he or she undergoes. All the three positivities, thus, turn to the
individual living human being, and makes him or her the centre of its new epistemic
configuration. This is why Foucault contends that this is the age when for the first time 'man'
appears as a category in the horizon of Western thought. And, the next section of the chapter
would examine what, according to Foucault, has been the significance of this appearance on
modern Western thought.

90 Ibid., 298.
V. The Birth and the Death of ‘Man’: Human Sciences and Beyond

a. Modernity, Language, and the Birth of ‘Man’

Foucault shows that while the replacement of natural history and analysis of wealth by biology and economics brought in the central categories of life and production in the domains of physicality and materiality, in the domain of mentality, the replacement of general grammar by philology did not provide for any united category. He says,

When the table of natural history was dissociated, the living beings within it were not dispersed, but, on the contrary, regrouped around the central enigma of life; when the analysis of wealth had disappeared, all economic processes were regrouped around the central fact of production and all that rendered it possible; on the other hand, when the unity of general grammar—discourse—was broken up, language appeared in a multiplicity of modes of being, whose unity was probably irrecoverable. 91

This gives a special status to language in the modern episteme, and the answer that Mallarmé provides to certain fundamental questions raised by Nietzsche about the nature of language has absolute importance in determining its course. For Nietzsche, it is not very useful to know what good and evil are in themselves, and one should rather know who or what is being designated in such a typology. This insistence on the identity of the implicator or the implicated raises the fundamental Nietzschean question, ‘Who is speaking?’, to which Mallarmé replies that it is basically the word itself. This loss of subjectivity to the totality of the word in an age when in all the other domains the human form was emerging as a positivity, leads to an attempt on the part of the adherents of the modern episteme to find a way for the human race around language. This was what, as Foucault says, Nietzsche attempted when, in the interior space of his language, he simultaneously killed man and God to give humanity the promise of a Return and the superman. This is how it was through language that the category of the human being, what Foucault calls the ‘man’, comes to be instated in a supreme position of autonomous positivity for the first time in Western thought. ‘Man’ thus becomes a category peculiar to the modern episteme, and Foucault says,

Before the end of the eighteenth century, man did not exist—any more than the potency of life, the fecundity of labour, or the historical density of language. He is a quite recent creature, which the demiurge of knowledge fabricated with its own hands less than two hundred years ago: but has grown old so quickly that it has been only too easy to imagine that he had been waiting for thousands of years in the darkness for that moment of illumination in which he would finally be known. 92

The modern image of the individual is thus of one who lives, speaks, and works according to the laws of biology, philology, and economics, but who also has the right to know and be the master of those very laws. This stature of a human being as the author of nature, while being, in himself or herself, a natural being indicates the birth of ‘man’, who can now take up the privileged position that Classical representation denied him. For Foucault.

91 Ibid., 304.
92 Ibid., 308.
When natural history becomes biology, when the analysis of wealth becomes economics, when, above all, reflection upon language becomes philology, and Classical discourse, in which being and representation found their common locus, is eclipsed, then, in the profound upheaval of such an archaeological mutation, man appears in his ambiguous position as a subject that knows: enslaved sovereign, observed spectator, he appears in the place belonging to the king, which was assigned to him in advance by Las Meninas, but from which his real presence has for so long been excluded.93

After this, representation no longer manifests the identity of things themselves, but only the external relation they establish with the human being, so that ‘man’ becomes the centre of all subsequent discourse. The triad in Classical or even early nineteenth century thought gets revised, hereafter, into that of positivities centred around ‘man’, because he is the one who speaks, he is the one seen to reside among animals, and because it is the relation between his needs and the means he possesses that determines all production.

b. The Analytic of Finitude and the Dual ‘Man’

It can be noted, however, that this subjectivity accorded to ‘man’ is not an unconditional one, because, as has been stated earlier, while he can definitely become the master of the laws of economics, life and language, he himself is finally controlled by and subject to the same laws. Thus, the foregrounding of ‘man’ in the modern age as a supreme category entails, paradoxically, his finitude too. This finitude is, however, not read by the modern nascent ‘man’ as his end, but as a temporal limitation that can only get better with the progress of time. This makes ‘man’ form a whole new analytical method based on his finitude, against whose backdrop he would construct the changing faces of economics, biology and philology. The duality in the Classical age between the metaphysics of representation and its analysis into the triad, gets replaced, under the eyes of ‘man’, by a pair of concurrent, if also contesting, modes—that of the analytic of finitude, and that of the formation of the metaphysics of the modern triad. For Foucault,

where there had formerly been a correlation between a metaphysics of representation and of the infinite and an analysis of living beings, of man’s desires, and of the words of his language, we find being constituted an analytic of finitude and human existence, and in opposition to it (though in correlative opposition) a perpetual tendency to constitute a metaphysics of life, labour, and language.94

This passing over from the analytic of finitude to the metaphysical triad is, however, only an intermediate tendency, because the finitude of the central category of ‘man’ reinforces a finitude of its own metaphysical impulses too. The analytic of finitude brings to an end any metaphysics in the modern tripartition of bodies of thought, so that soon the philosophy of life denounces metaphysics as illusion: that of labour denounces it as alienated thought, false

93 Ibid., 312.
94 Ibid., 317.
consciousness and ideology; and that of language denies its validity as a cultural episode. 'Man', thus, in spite of his objective status to the modes of knowledge, gains through the analytic of finitude, the position of subjectivity. This subjectivity makes 'man' appear, however, not in a supremely transcendental form, but as, what Foucault calls, an *empirico-transcendental doublet*, where he is, on the one hand, a merely empirical being constituted by empirical knowledge, but, on the other, the transcendental subject of that knowledge itself.

This doublet leads to two kinds of analysis. The first operates, like the Kantian transcendental aesthetic, within the space of the body by studying human perception, sensorial mechanisms and neuro-motor diagrams. The second operates, like the Kantian transcendental dialectic, to show that knowledge had historical, social, or economic conditions, and was not an independent formation. These two types of analysis converge in the two supplementary modern methods of positivism, which traces the genesis of discourse in empirical truth and its course in history, and eschatology, which anticipates in advance a truth whose nature and history it defines. Foucault shows how the two methods are not in opposition, but necessarily act in conjunction in the modern episteme, as is evident in the works of Marx and Comte:

In fact, it is a question not so much of an alternative as of a fluctuation inherent in all analysis, which brings out the value of the empirical at the transcendental level. Comte and Marx both bear out the fact that eschatology (as the objective truth proceeding from man's discourse) and positivism (as the truth of discourse defined on the basis of the truth of the object) are archaeologically indissociable: a discourse attempting to be both empirical and critical cannot but be both positivist and eschatological: man appears within it as a truth both reduced and promised.95

Foucault shows that this twin method of reconciling the apparent split in 'man' also accounts for the co-existence of both positivist and phenomenological philosophies in the modern age.

The fact that man is, in the nineteenth century, an empirico-transcendental doublet, where he is not only a transcendental subject but also an empirical object, restrains him from positing himself as the sovereign transparency of a Cartesian cogito, while it also denies him the possibility of not thinking and not knowing at all. Thus, though there can never come a time when 'man' would possess exhaustive knowledge, he has to always move from the not-known towards original self-knowledge. These two imperatives of the newly constituted 'man' takes one to the next two features of the episteme, the primacy of the unthought, and the absolute necessity of a return to the origin, and these are what I discuss in the next section of the chapter. The different status that modern language comes to occupy leads to the notion of human finitude, which in its analytical form creates a doublet out of the human being, the contesting features of which requires a foregrounding of the unthought and a search for the origin, leading finally, in a cohesion of all the four categories to the creation of 'man'.

95 Ibid., 320.
c. Of the Unthought and a Return to the Origin

It has already been discussed how the emergence of 'man' in the Western intellectual horizon dethrones the Cartesian cogito from its privileged ontological position, and foregrounds, in its place, the domain of non-thinking, of the unthought. Foucault says,

The modern cogito...must traverse, duplicate, and reactivate in an explicit form the articulation of thought on everything within it, around it, and beneath it which is not thought, yet which is nevertheless not foreign to thought, in the sense of an irreducible, an insuperable exteriority. In this form the cogito will not therefore be the sudden and illuminating discovery that all thought is thought, but the constantly renewed interrogation as to how thought can reside elsewhere than here, and yet so very close to itself; how it can be in the forms of non-thinking.  

A totally new configuration thus comes into being, which moves the relation between being and thought far away from both Cartesianism and Kantian analysis. It is interesting to note that the emergence of the human being, as a positivity for the first time, dissolves the essence of an individual's 'being' in the dialectics between thought and the unthought.

This dissolution of the Cartesian self has two consequences in the history of modern Western thought. The first is that of Husserlian phenomenology, which attempted to unify the Cartesian cogito and the transcendental motif that Kant derived from Hume's critique, to restore the Western ratio to its seat of pure philosophy. For Foucault, however, Husserl was able to do so only because, by his time, transcendental analysis had changed its point of application from the possibility of a science of nature to the possibility of that of 'man', and the cogito had modified it function from leading one to a self-affirming apodictic thought to providing a multiple interrogation of the being. Phenomenology, for Foucault, is thus not at all a return to old rationalism, but a thought rooted in the humanistic turn in the modern episteme, and therefore dedicated to the discovery of life, work, and language, the unveiling of the new figure of 'man', and questioning the mode of human existence in relation to the unthought. The second consequence is the appearance in Western culture of the notion of the unconscious. The now all-so-truistic admission of the existence of an unconscious as beyond visible human reality, and yet leading to the constitution of most of it, had its inception because of the premium put on the category of unthought on the emergence of 'man'.

In trying to characterize the unthought, Foucault shows how it is not a corpus of positive human history, but rather the ever-present Other to the conscious thinking 'man':

The unthought (whatever name we give it) is not lodged in man like a shrivelled-up nature or a stratified history; it is, in relation to man, the Other: the Other that is not only a brother but a twin, born, not of man, nor in man, but beside him and at the same time, in an identical newness, in an unavoidable duality.  

96 Ibid., 324.  
97 Ibid., 326.
Foucault shows how this unthought existed as the Other all through nineteenth and early twentieth century philosophy. In Hegelian phenomenology, it was the *An sich* as opposed to the *Für sich*; for Schopenhauer, it was the *Unbewusste*; for Marx, it was alienated man; and for Husserl, it was the implicit, the inactual, the sedimented, and the non-effected. The fact that unthought transforms even the other, which normally plays a negative role, into a positive category leads to the absence of any moralistic philosophy in the modern age. Foucault ends his discussion of the unthought with a statement to demonstrate how therefore the emergence of 'man' in the horizon of Western thought does away with the value-loaded order of morals:

[Modern thought] formulates no morality, since any imperative is lodged within thought and its movement towards the apprehension of the unthought... For modern thought, no morality is possible... Sade, Nietzsche, Artaud, and Bataille have understood this on behalf of all those who tried to ignore it; but it is also certain that Hegel, Marx, and Freud knew it.91

Coming next to the second point of the origin, Foucault shows how in the eighteenth century, return to the origin involved placing oneself as near as possible to the duplication of representation, but in modern thought, representation itself having been done away with, this could not have been the case. In the modern *episteme*, labour, life, and language acquire their own historicity, and so can never point towards a unitary origin, while their governing force history is, paradoxically, always directed towards it. This paradox of having to posit an origin without having any realistic chances of attaining the same has two aspects. On the one hand, it signifies that the origin of things is limitlessly pushed back to a far-off time when 'man' did not exist. On the other hand, if, in spite of this, 'man' is under the imperative of looking for origins, it must be that he is beyond the origin, or conversely, that it is in his consciousness that the origin of things forms itself. Thus, once again 'man' becomes the centre and the primary source of all knowledge, and human knowledge becomes a repetitive return to this origin. To stress on the epistemological primacy of this category in modern philosophy, Foucault shows how both the self-reflexive thought of Hegel and Marx, and the discontinuist philosophy of Nietzsche and Heidegger deal with return to the origin, albeit in different ways:

Thus from Hegel to Marx and Spengler we find the developing theme of a thought which, by the movement in which it is accomplished...curves over upon itself, illuminates its own plenitude, brings its circle to completion...and accepts its disappearance into the same ocean from which it sprang; in opposition to this return, which, even though it is not happy, is perfect, we find the experience of Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, in which the return is posited only in the extreme recession of the origin...so that what we are concerned with here is neither a completion nor a curve, but rather that ceaseless rending open which frees the origin in exactly that degree to which it recedes; the extreme is therefore what is nearest.99

98 *ibid.*, 328.
99 *ibid.*, 334.
d. ‘*Man*’ and the General Table of the Quadrilateral

Four key categories — the connection of positivities with finitude, the formation of the *empirico-transcendental doublet*, the perpetual relation of consciousness to the *unthought*, and the retreat and return of the *origin* — define the creation of ‘man’ in the modern age. Foucault shows that these four theoretical segments correspond to the four categories in the quadrilateral of the general theory of language in the Classical age. While the theory of *proposition* explained how language could go beyond its immediate boundaries and represent reality, the analysis of finitude explains how finite human existence finds itself determined by positivities which are exterior to it, but it, in return, gives those positivities their possibility of appearance. While the theory of *articulation* showed that the patterning of words and things occur without a hiatus between them, the *empirico-transcendental doublet* of ‘man’ shows how objects and conditions of experience correspond to one another in an endless oscillation. While the theory of primitive *designations* sought the hidden forgotten root of a word, the modern category of the *unthought* explores the dormant roots of thought hidden below the *cogito*. Finally, while the theory of *derivation*, in its attempt to see how the meaning of a word changes, moves up history towards an elusive origin, the modern theory of the *origin* also searches this ever-distanced and ever-sought source of things.

Thus the Classical quadrilateral gets replaced with a new anthropological quadrilateral, the sovereignty of an immortal *cogito* being substituted by the finitude of ‘man’ as a living, speaking, and labouring individual. For Foucault, this reversal had already been formulated by Kant in his *Logic*, when he added to his trilogy of critical questions (What can I know? What must I do? What am I permitted to hope?) a fourth one: ‘Was ist der Mensch?’, or ‘What is man?’. The fact that one can have an independent anthropological quadrilateral implies that the category of ‘man’ can create its own triad of positivities. Thus one can see, within the modern *episteme*, a displacement of the historical triad of economics-biology-philology by an anthropological triad of ‘Human Sciences’—sociology-psychology-literary studies, and this is what I discuss in the next section of the chapter. The basic ahistoricity of the model, however, awaits, according to Foucault, a definite overthrow, brought about by the death of ‘man’, something that Nietzsche made corollary to the death of God:

> In order to awaken thought from such a sleep...there is no other way than to destroy the anthropological ‘quadrilateral’ in its very foundations...perhaps we should see the first attempt at this uprooting of Anthropology—to which, no doubt, contemporary thought is dedicated—in the Nietzschean experience: by means of a philological critique, by means of a certain form of biologism, Nietzsche rediscovered the point at which man and God belong to one another, at which the death of the second is synonymous with the disappearance of the first, and at which the promise of the superman signifies first and foremost the imminence of the death of man.\(^{100}\)

\(^{100}\) *Ibid.*, 341-42.
e. **The Triad of Human Sciences**

For Foucault, the modern *episteme* is space open in three dimensions, in one of which lie the mathematical and the physical sciences belonging to a deductive order; in the second of which lie the empirical sciences of economics, biology and philology; and in the last of which lies philosophical reflection. The first and the third dimensions intersect to form the domain of formalized thought, the second and the third dimensions intersect in the domain of ideas, or speculative thought, while the first and the second dimensions also have points of converge in terms of tools and methods. Thus, the human sciences are not included in any of the dimensions or planes of this epistemological trihedron, but Foucault feels that the human sciences are located in the volume of this figure. This fourth branch of thought, thus, is related to all the other three forms. While its relation to the mathematical and the philosophical domain is purely methodological, it is with the empirical sciences of language, life, and labour, that it has an ontological relationship. Foucault says,

> In fact, the human sciences are addressed to man in so far as he lives, speaks, and produces... The site of the sciences of man may therefore be fixed in the vicinity, on the immediate frontiers, and along the whole length of those sciences that deal with life, labour, and language. Were they not formed, after all, at precisely that period when, for the first time, man offered himself to the possibility of a positive knowledge? Nevertheless, biology, economics, and philology must not be regarded as the first human sciences, or the most fundamental.\(^{101}\)

In spite of this proximity, one should study the human sciences as separate from the basic concerns of the modern empirical positivities. For the human science belonging to the domain of physicality, the human being is not just a biological object to be studied in terms of organic structure, but a subject who continuously represents one's own self to oneself through a process of living thought. For the human science belonging to the domain of materiality, the human being is not one doomed to incessant labour, but one who can represent his or her needs and their fulfilment in a social structure. Similarly, the human science belonging to the domain of mentality does not study language in its positivity, but concentrates on how language can represent the story of human existence. The human sciences are not, therefore, a study of what nature provides to individuals, but what 'man' can do with them.

Introducing the three human sciences corresponding to the triad of positivities, Foucault shows how psychology takes up, in its extension of physiological neuro-motor functions to the domain of representative thought, the place of biology; sociology fills in, in its extension of human politico-economic behaviour to social representation and culture, the space of economics; and, literary and myth analysis, in its extension of rules of language to representational stories about the human race, substitutes philology. After presenting the triad,

\(^{101}\text{Ibid., 351.}\)
Foucault enumerates three pairs of concepts that work in the three domains to give the human sciences its peculiar formation. In the biological domain of psychology, on the one hand, the individual possesses functions, like receiving stimuli, coming to terms with them, and reacting to them, while on the other, there is a set of norms, to which he or she is supposed to adhere, and which is to allow a smooth execution of the functions. In the economic domain of sociology, on the one hand, there is a situation of conflict as every individual in society tries to fulfil his or her needs, but, on the other, there is a body of rules which result from, as well as try to limit, the conflict. In the linguistic domain of literature and myth studies, on the one hand, there is a signification to each and every human utterance and gesture, but, on the other, there is a coherent system of signs to make possible an analysis of the same.

Though function and norm originate in the domain of psychology, conflict and rule in the domain of sociology, and signification and system in the domain of literary and myth studies, it should not be assumed that they remain restricted to their respective domains of origin. All modern positivities, and especially the human sciences, show a lot of interaction between themselves, so much so that it might be possible to retrace the entire history of the human sciences on the basis of successive periods of domination of one of these three models over the others. First, the Romantic period saw the reign of the biological model, where human psyche, social formations, and languages were all considered as living beings and analysed in terms of function. After this, comes the reign of the economic model where all forms of human activity are analysed as conflicts. And finally, just as Freud comes after Comte and Marx, one finds the reign of the philological model of interpreting and discovering hidden meanings, and the linguistic model of giving a structure to the signifying system.

Foucault points out another shift in the domain of the human sciences, where the first term in each of the constituent pairs (function, conflict, signification) recedes and the second term (norm, rule, system) emerges with greater importance. Goldstein, Mauss, and Dumezil represent, for Foucault, the moment at which the reversal took place in psychology, sociology, and literary/myth analysis, respectively. As long as the functional point of view carried more weight than the normative one, normal functions had the same status as the non-normal, and pathological psychology was accepted side by side with normal psychology, a pathology of societies, as in Durkheim, was accepted, as was also Lévy-Bruhl or Blondel’s studies of irrational and morbid forms of belief. Similarly, as long as the point of view of conflict was more important than that of the rule, it was supposed that certain conflicts could not be overcome; and, as long as the point of view of signification gained primacy over system, a division was made between significant and non-significant domains of human behaviour. When, on the other hand, analysis was conducted from the point of view of the
norm, the rule, or the system, there was no scope for abnormalities in the psychological, sociological or discursive domains, and everything had to be remedied to be contained within a structure of order. For Foucault, Freud marks, with his therapeutic measures for the neurotic, the switchover from the first mode to the second, and the twentieth-century image of 'man' was based to a great extent on Freud's work. He says,

And bearing in mind that Freud more than anyone else brought the knowledge of man closer to its philological and linguistic model, and that he was also the first to undertake the radical erasure of the division between positive and negative (between the normal and the pathological, the comprehensible and the incommunicable, the significant and the non-significant), it is easy to see how he prefigures the transition from an analysis in terms of functions, conflicts, and significations to an analysis in terms of norms, rules, and systems; thus all this knowledge, within which Western culture had given itself in one century a certain image of man, pivots on the work of Freud...\(^{102}\)

This is not mere Foucauldian hyperbole, and as will be shown in the immediately next subsection of the chapter, Freud and his psychoanalysis represents, in more ways than one, the last important break in the history of Western thought, where the category of 'man' dissolves under the power of the impersonal system.

These three pairs of categories make the long-lost Classical order of representation play an important role in the human sciences. First, the signification/system pair presents representability of language as text or as analysed by philology and linguistics, while also contemplating on the elusive presence of the origin. Secondly, the conflict/rule pair sees to the representability of need in social structures, and also that of the unthought covered in the analytic of finitude. Lastly, the concept of function shows how structures of life may become representative through psychological reconstructions, and the concept of norm shows how function provides its own conditions of possibility as well as limits much like the empirico-transcendental doublet. This leads to two inferences, the first of which is that the human sciences are at a disjunction with the modern empirical sciences, as well as the basic precepts of modern thought, in relying so heavily on representation. The second inference is that the human sciences treat as their objects the four founding principles of finitude, duality, unthought, and the origin, which actually comprise their conditions of possibility, the positivities thus becoming very susceptible to a critical self-examination and collapse. It has already been shown how the passing over of the human sciences into a norms-rules-system model marked its impersonalization and, therefore, a denial of the very category of 'man'. It is also clear that since the human sciences rely heavily on representation, they are at disjunction with History, the constitutive category of the episteme they belong to. These two factors, along with the internal weakness of the field in examining its own conditions of possibility, bring about an end to the human sciences, not many years after they were formed.

\(^{102}\) Ibid., 361.
f. *History and the Possibility of ‘Counter-Sciences’*

It has been stated in the preceding sub-section that their disjunction with history was one of the prime reasons behind the collapse of the sciences of ‘man’, and this sub-section will study how the human sciences encode history, before it moves on to describe how these sciences eventually give way to what Foucault calls ‘counter-sciences’. History in the human sciences comprised, much like the great cosmic chronology of the Stoics, an ordering of the time of human beings upon the development of the whole world, or inversely, much like Christian providence, an extension of the principle of human destiny to every particle of nature. This, thus, points towards a uniform and seamless history, much like that of the Classical period, which was one of the first things modernity got rid of, and one can conclude, like Foucault, that this version of history was quite contrary to the modern notion of History:

And it was this unity that was shattered at the beginning of the nineteenth century, in the great upheaval that occurred in the Western *episteme*: it was discovered that there existed a historicity proper to nature... which would make possible a subsequent definition of its evolutionary outline; moreover, it became possible to show that activities as peculiarly human as labour or language contained within themselves a historicity that could not be placed within the great narrative common to things and to men...¹⁰³

Foucault explains how this reversal of history could take place within the modern *episteme*, which is usually characterized by its historicity. Normally, one believes that the nineteenth century, because of the political reason of the rise of the bourgeoisie—a class which wanted to chronicle all its phenomenal achievements—foregrounded history and change against the erstwhile continuous order of time. According to Foucault, however, it was the opposite that happened, and in the modern age, life was cut off from the distant point of genesis, labour was dissociated from any promised golden age, and languages were torn off from their primitive origins. Thus, the ‘man’ who appears at the beginning of the nineteenth century is ‘dehistoricized’, with no positivity of history to belong to, and the only tangible history being that of the ‘man’ himself. While, on the one hand, the modern empirical sciences tried to resist this dehistoricization by placing a progressively increased focus on history, the *human* sciences imbued this anthropocentric non-history as its only history. Foucault shows how, therefore, the more the human sciences wanted to include everything within its version of history, the more it got disjunct from History proper, and degenerated:

In any case, this arrangement of history within the epistemological space is of great importance for its relation with the human sciences. Since historical man is living, working, and speaking man, any content of History is the province of psychology, sociology, or the sciences of language. But, inversely, since the human being has become historical, through and through, none of the contents analysed by the human sciences can remain stable in itself or escape the movement of History.¹⁰⁴

The second point of opposition between history and the human sciences comes from the fact that historicism and the analytic of finitude are quite contrary to each other. Historicism is a means of validating for itself the perpetual critical relation at play between History and the human sciences. If historicism was to enter the domain of human sciences, Foucault says, it would have at the level of physicality talked of interpersonal and person-object comprehension, like the Lebenswelt, rather than an exclusively personal psychology; of interhuman communication through different social structures, instead of the sociologistic study of one insulated society; and of hermeneutics, or a contextual search for deeper meanings, rather than mere textual interpretations. This attempt on the part of history to liberate the human sciences from their insulated basis on a single 'man' or a single, well-defined set of individuals, makes it question the very idea of limitedness or finitude of 'man'. And finitude being the very constitutive category of human sciences, history cannot find a place in them. All these characteristics, outcomes and shortcomings of the human sciences—their finitude, their ahistoricism, their reliance on representation, their continuous self-criticism, tendencies towards their progressive impersonalization and inter-personalization—contribute together to give rise to some alternate sciences of the human being.

Psychoanalysis, the first of these sciences, makes representation and finitude interact in making the unconscious speak through consciousness, psychoanalysis is advancing in the direction of that fundamental region in which the relations of come into play. As a second function towards ridding the human sciences of some of their inconsistencies, psychoanalysis makes the elements of each of the three pairs of concepts in human sciences to co-exist and form a selfsame triad. At a third level this unification of the pairs makes possible for psychoanalysis to introduce three new figures into the three domains of thought: life, with its functions and norms, gets replaced with the repetition of Death, conflicts and rules with the rawness of Desire, and significations and systems gain their foundation in language which is also Law. These three figures restore, as a fourth function of psychoanalysis, the original roles of the four foundational categories of the human sciences, which the latter had converted into its objects of knowledge, and lost the sanctity of. Foucault says,

...these figures are in fact...the very forms of finitude, as it is analysed in modern thought. Is death not that upon the basis of which knowledge in general is possible—so much so that we can think of it as being, in the area of psychoanalysis, the figure of that empirico-transcendental duplication that characterizes man's mode of being within finitude? Is desire not that which remains always unthought at the heart of thought? And the law-language (at once word and word-system) that psychoanalysis takes such pains to make speak, is it not that in which all signification assumes an origin more distant than itself, but also that whose return is promised in the very act of analysis?105

105 Ibid., 375.
As a sixth function, the therapeutic nature of the psychoanalyst-patient duo introduces both the features of impersonalization and inter-personalization to this positivity. The final change that psychoanalysis brings to the domain of human sciences is of converting a purely speculative, often representational body of knowledge into an empirical science, based on rigorous praxis. For Foucault, it is finally the triad that this praxis between two individuals posits, where one person listens to the other's language, frees him or her from the desire of any lost object, and liberates him or her from the ever-repeated sensation of death, that forms a new formation in the older tripartite order of things.

Just as psychoanalysis bases itself on the unconscious, the second alternate science of ethnology situates itself in historicity. Ethnology is the study of how, within a given culture, there happens a normalization of the broad biological functions, a formalization of rules that make exchange, production, and consumption possible, and the constitution of systems organized on the model of linguistic structures. Ethnology, thus, tries to relate the modern empirical sciences of biology, economics and philology to the human science of sociology, and is therefore a bridge between nature and culture. The historical dimension of ethnology comes especially from the fact that it is connected with colonialism, and has its roots in that moment of Western history, when European nations came in contact with diverse cultures. Foucault argues that, just as hypnosis or the patient's alienation is not constitutive of psychoanalysis though at times they help, colonialism is also not indispensable to ethnology but can become one of its most likely tools. As a discipline, ethnology tries to read through, from an apparently neutral perspective, the representations that people of a culture form of their life, their needs, and the significations in their language, and it collapses, in the process, the binary pairs of function and norm, conflict and rule, and signification and system, respectively. Thus, just like psychoanalysis, ethnology too, through an introduction of historicity, a debunking of representation, and a collapse of the binary triad of categories, challenges the human sciences and turns itself into another 'counter-science'.

Foucault, therefore brings these two positivities of psychoanalysis and ethnology together, and clubs them, in their common dissolution of 'man', as 'counter-sciences':

But their development has one particular feature, which is that, despite their quasi-universal 'bearing', they never, for all that, come near to a general concept of man... One may say of both of them what Lévi-Strauss said of ethnology: that they dissolve man... In relation to the 'human sciences', psychoanalysis and ethnology are rather 'counter-sciences'; which does not mean that they are less 'rational' or 'objective' than the others, but that they flow in the opposite direction, that they lead them back to their epistemological basis, and that they ceaselessly 'unmake' that very man who is creating and re-creating his positivity in the human sciences.106

106 Ibid., 379.
In his attempt to locate these two new counter-sciences within a new coherent episteme, Foucault tries to see next if there are any possible points of convergence between psychoanalysis and ethnology. For Foucault, ethnology would gain huge prestige and importance, if it were, in collusion with psychoanalysis, to study the unconscious processes that constitute a given culture, just as would psychoanalysis, if it discovers, in collusion with ethnology, that the unconscious possesses a formal structure. In this way, for Foucault, the two differently oriented lines—that of psychoanalysis, proceeding from the absence of the signified in neurosis to a discovery of the lack in the signifying system through which the neurosis got expressed; and that of ethnology, proceeding from the analogy between multiple signifieds of cultural constructs, like mythologies, to the unity of a cultural signifying structure—have a point of intersection in the phenomenon of signification. Thus, one finds a third categorical domain emerging, and it is with the positivity that emerges in this domain that the triad of counter-sciences gets complete.

And this is how, in addition to the ‘physical’ positivity of psychoanalysis, and the ‘material’ one of ethnology, one finds the establishment of a new positivity of linguistics in the mental-significational domain of the new episteme. Linguistics acts just like a counter-science not only because it originates at the point of intersection of two other counter-sciences, but also because, on the one hand, being a science of pure language, it deals with positivities exterior to ‘man’, and on the other, all thought being limited by language it addresses the question of finitude. Foucault explains why literature from surrealism onwards has been so obsessed with the being of language, and has expressed incessantly the very four constitutive categories of modern humanistic thought, albeit in a historical way, and says:

That literature in our day is fascinated by the being of language is neither the sign of an imminent end nor proof of a radicalization: it is a phenomenon whose necessity has its roots in a vast configuration in which the whole structure of our thought and our knowledge is traced... it was inevitable that this new mode of being of literature should have been revealed in works like those of Artaud and Roussel—and by men like them... And it is indeed in this space thus revealed that literature, first with surrealism (though still in a very much disguised form), then, more and more purely, with Kafka, Bataille, and Blanchot, posited itself as experience: as experience of death (and in the element of death), of unthinkable thought (and in its inaccessible presence), of repetition (of original innocence, always there at the nearest and yet always the most distant limit of language); as experience of finitude (trapped in the opening and the tyranny of that finitude).107

Thus, at the end of his discussion of the counter-sciences, Foucault is back, with the triad of psychoanalysis, ethnology, and linguistics, to his old game of establishing an exhaustive trichotomy of modes of thought and thereby establishing the coherence of an episteme; and, one can infer from this the death of ‘man’ as a category and an end to humanistic thought.

107 Ibid., 383-84.
g. *The Death of 'Man' and the Likely End of Modernity*

At the end of his huge (both in terms of size and import) book, in spite of having identified the notion of a united *episteme* acting at different points of time to carve out from the chaos of reality an ordered triad of positivities, Foucault feels that nothing has come to an end, and rather everything is beginning anew, with a new epistemological configuration taking shape under the aegis of the new triad of the counter-sciences. And, this end to modernity comes from the death of ‘man’ that these new sciences bring forth to reconcile with the Nietzschean principle of the death of God. Foucault feels:

And yet the impression of fulfilment and of end, the muffled feeling that carries and animates our thought, and perhaps lulls it to sleep with the facility of its promises, and makes us believe that something new is about to begin, something we glimpse only as a thin line of light low on the horizon—that feeling and that impression are perhaps not ill founded. It will be said that they exist, that they have never ceased to be formulated over and over again since the early nineteenth century; it will be said that Hölderlin, Hegel, Feuerbach, and Marx all felt this certainty that in them a thought and perhaps a culture were coming to a close, and that from the depths of a distance, which was perhaps not invincible, another was approaching... But this close, this perilous imminence whose promise we fear today, whose danger we welcome, is probably not of the same order... In our day, and once again Nietzsche indicated the turning-point from a long way off, it is not so much the absence or the death of God that is affirmed as the end of man...it becomes apparent, then, that the death of God and the last man are engaged in a contest with more than one round... Thus, the last man is at the same time older and yet younger than the death of God; since he has killed God, it is he himself who must answer for his own finitude; but since it is in the death of God that he speaks, thinks, and exists, his murder itself is doomed to die... Rather than the death of God—or, rather, in the wake of that death and in a profound correlation with it—what Nietzsche’s thought heralds is the end of his murderer...  

This new *episteme* is characterized by a return of language or signification at the very centre of intellectual activities. Since the whole of modernity was composed in reaction to the primacy accorded to language in the Classical age, this reinstatement of language, by the counter-sciences, marks the end of modernity, and the consequent end of the recently invented category of ‘man’. Celebrating the end of this subjective category that the ahistorical human sciences so dote on, and ushering in the possibility of an altogether new age, Foucault ends his book with a statement that not only seals the fate of ‘man’ in the Western discursive space, but marks the whole of the current book as not just an objective treatise on the order of words, things, and life, but one heralding in a new age, a new way of thought.

One thing in any case is certain: man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge... It is not around him and his secrets that knowledge prowled for so long in the darkness. In fact, among all the mutations that have affected the knowledge of things and their order...only one, that which began a century and a half ago and is now perhaps drawing to a close, has made it possible for the figure of man to appear... As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end...one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.  

108 Ibid., 384-85.  
109 Ibid., 386-87.
VI. Conclusion: Trichotomization, Method and Politics

The Order of Things, thus, introduces some very important concepts most coherently, but at the same time, one cannot but feel a little disconcerted at the fact that Foucault does not bring up here the equally important concerns of his method and the role of power in epistemological formations. My central thesis—that things represented in discourse get ordered in a tripartite model of mentality-materiality-physicality, that this ordering is manifest in its dialectics with people through a pattern of hierarchies in these three domains, and that something like Foucault's genealogical and archaeological method can question and demolish these hierarchic patterns—requires the presence of not just the first point of identifying the three domains, but also the other two categories of tri-hierarchization and dehierarchization. In this book, Foucault formulates the category of episteme: showing how disparate bodies of thought come from the same patterns of order in a particular period, while apparently similar bodies belonging to different periods are very different in terms of their basic order; and also showing how this ordering always takes place in the three domains I have already identified. He does, however, merely mention the archaeological method that he employs to do the same, without describing it or elaborating on its functional principles. Similarly, he does mention history, but forgets altogether to show how it is tendentious, and how forms of knowledge are essentially linked to the forms of power that history entails. This apparent incongruity can be provided with two explanations. The first is a facile one, which states that the subsequent bodies of work by Foucault more than compensate for these two shortcomings, so that his next work The Archaeology of Knowledge deals exclusively with method, and the next three bodies of work take up exclusively the case of politics in the three domains of discourse, social structures, and sexuality, corresponding to the three domains he identifies in this book. The second is a more ambitious one. The last epistemic configuration that Foucault mentions places the analysis of linguistic discourse in the domain of mentality, that of ethnology with its analysis of socio-cultural formations in that of materiality, and psychoanalysis with its emphasis on sexuality in physicality, thus foregrounding finally the three categories that Foucault takes up for political analysis later in his career. It can also be noted that an analysis of discourse in terms of politics comes into being in Western thought only in the last few decades, when Foucault's final episteme has made discursive analysis the operational ground for the forces of desire and structuration. Can one say, therefore, that the new age Foucault heralds at the end of the book entails politics in itself? And, can one similarly say that the book itself embodies a method towards its identification? In short, can one not, quite contrary to the apparent and alleged incompleteness of the book, see in it the whole of Foucauldian philosophy—his ontology in its content, his epistemology in its form, and its ethics in its conclusion and the possibility it offers?